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# DANNY'S TREASURE





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## NANNY'S TREASURE







P. 132.

# Hannys Treasure

OR

## TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS

From the French of  
MADAME DE STOLZ



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AND ROYAL ULSTER WORKS, BELFAST  
1876

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## NANNY'S TREASURE.

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### CHAP. I.—THE LITTLE HOUSEKEEPER.

FOUR hens, a lamb, and three long-eared rabbits were Madeline's only possessions. Madeline was thirteen years old, and the comfort and stay of her poor widowed mother. Her father had been dead two years, and her brothers, Jack and Andrew, were too little to be of use to any one. Life had been a hard struggle since the father's death, for his little family was left with no other means of support than the work of one pair of woman's hands. And now the owner of those hands felt her strength beginning to fail. The rough work on the neighbouring farm and the constant exposure had been too much for poor Bridget;

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and in spite of a brave heart and a willing spirit, the dread of starvation had begun to haunt her day and night.

Poverty looks ugly and repulsive in the narrow dark alleys and close courts of a great city ; not so in the country. Bridget's cottage garden was full of roses, the swallows built under the spreading thatch, the air was pure and sweet, and the green upland and wide expanse of sky were the property of all to enjoy. Then, too, Bridget was proud, so she did her best to hide her poverty. Many and many were the hours she spent, when the children were asleep, patching, and washing, and darning their clothes ; no matter if her back ached and her eyes burned, so that she could keep them tidy and clean.

But day by day she grew less fit for work ; the thought of what would become of them if she fell sick was always present with her, and when she laid her head on the pillow at night, it burned and throbbed so that she could not sleep.

At last one morning she felt that it was no

use trying to hold up any longer, and when the first rays of light streamed through the chinks of the shutter, she called to her daughter, saying—

“ Madeline, dear, make haste and get up ; I cannot, my head aches so ; you must be my little housekeeper to-day.”

“ All right ; here I am,” cried Madeline, as she jumped out of bed and stood beside her mother ; “ tell me what I’m to do first. I’m a big girl now, for I was thirteen yesterday, you know ! But oh ! mother darling, whatever is the matter with you ? your cheeks are so red !

“ I am very feverish this morning, dear, and my head aches worse than usual.”

“ Poor mother ! I’ll dress as quickly as ever I can, and bring you a cup of coffee—that’s sure to do you good ; and presently, when you’ve given me some money, I’ll run to the butcher’s for a piece of meat to make broth with. Perhaps when you’ve had some nice broth you’ll be able to get up.”

“ I’ve no money left, dear, to buy meat,

and what is to become of us I really don't know ; I'm too sick to work, and you're too young."

"Oh no ! I'm not. Now just don't trouble about us ; I shall manage somehow ; I've lots of ideas in my head ; wait and see."

Saying this, Madeline let down the shutter and opened the window ; for a moment she stood and looked out on the dewy fields and bright clear sky, then shut it again, and, kneeling down at the foot of her mother's bed, said her prayers.

"Now let me see," she said in a low voice after she had washed and dressed herself, "what's the first thing to be done ?"

"Light the fire and put the kettle on," was her mother's answer, "and then take some potatoes out, and wash them at the pump, for there's nothing else for dinner to-day, and don't use more wood than you can help, we've so little left."

"No, no, you may trust me ; you'll see how careful I can be. I shan't use a bit more than you do ; I know exactly how you lay it. Dear,

if only you weren't ill, mother, what fun it would be lighting the fire. Now must I wake the children?" said Madeline, with comic gravity and importance.

"No, let them sleep if they will, poor darlings! Bless them! they know nothing of the trouble in store."

"Now, mother, you're not to fret about us; you really mustn't, for we're happy enough, aren't we? Why, haven't I got you? And there's Jacky, he laughs all day long, so, of course, he's happy; now, mother, you know he is; and as for Andrew"—

"Poor little Andrew! he cried for a bit of sugar yesterday, and to think that I hadn't it to give him!"

"Now, mother darling, it's too bad; you noticed his tears, and never noticed that the very next minute he was laughing and clapping his hands at the paper cap I made him."

"Well, well! You're a good girl, Maddy, and always know how to comfort everybody, and I ought not to complain with such a daughter as you to help and comfort me.

Your father was right when he said, 'I'm not leaving you alone, wife, with the little ones ; you've got Madeline to help you.' Those were his last words. . . . But there, I musn't be thinking of that now ; it'll do no good. Dear, how my poor head throbs. Be as quiet as you can, and perhaps I shall be able to sleep."

"That's right, mother ; turn your face to the wall, shut your eyes, and don't trouble any more about things."

Bridget gave the girl a loving look and shut her eyes, but she could not sleep. How was she not to "trouble about things" ? Were not her children constantly in her thoughts ? and was not her anxiety concerning them always present with her, waking and sleeping ? And now, as she lay half-dozing, horrible visions of hunger and want crowded upon her.

And yet, no doubt, Madeline, though in one way a cause of anxiety, was also an immense comfort to her ; she daily felt the worth of her loving tender heart and quiet good sense. The girl was thoughtful beyond her years, and her

small mind had early taken a practical turn. She never did anything hastily without thinking, and showed a wise discretion, even in the smallest concerns. On this particular day she deserved special credit for her cheerful readiness and desire to be useful, for it was the day of the village fair—a day long and eagerly looked forward to by the whole neighbouring population ; and now, as Madeline stood outside at the pump, washing the potatoes, she saw her playmates collecting at the cottage doors, or running down the village street in their Sunday clothes, looking out for the wonders that were to come. Madeline knew those wonders all by anticipation : the incomparable African giant, the hairy boy from the wilds of Siberia, the performing monkeys, the talking calf, the roundabout, the wheel of fortune—one turn of which would make you the happy possessor of a lovely string of beads, a gingerbread crown, a gay-coloured kerchief, or some other treasure equally precious in a girl's eyes—and last, not least, her favourite marionettes. Just as she lifted the great pump-handle to give her pota-

toes their final shower-bath, she fancied she heard the music she loved.

The village constable came by at that moment, and wished her a good morning. Even he had laid by his solemnity for that day ; his children were actually clinging to the tails of his long coat, and chattering away as if he were an ordinary mortal. It is only fair to say that it was seldom anything happened to disturb the public peace in the little village of St. Foy ; an occasional scuffle at the door of the public-house on market-days, a few kicks and cuffs to the tramps that occasionally passed that way, were the most arduous duties that devolved on the great village dignitary who combined the office of watchman and constable, and whose solemn appearance was wont to inspire the boys and girls of St. Foy with much awe.

"Good morning," said Madeline, in a cheerful voice, as she lifted her wooden bowl and went into the cottage. Of course she was not going to the fair ; mother would have to stay in bed all day, and she must keep house. Mother must be very ill indeed, for she

had never stayed in bed all day before that she could remember, though her head she knew often ached very much. Then Madeline remembered she should have to run down the street to the baker's presently, and might just get a peep at the tents. As these thoughts were passing through her mind, she heard a drum. The sound made her start, and she longed to fly to the gate; but no! she would think no more of the fair; her mother was ill, and she was to be housekeeper. So she fetched the broom, and began to sweep, first the front kitchen, and then the little room at the back; it was a pleasure to see how deftly she handled her broom, how carefully she swept out all the corners. Faithful to her mother's teaching, she would not let the dust rest, even where it could not be seen, and her busy broom left no spot untouched. Her mother seemed to be asleep, but in reality she was watching her all the time as she moved quickly and softly hither and thither, putting everything to rights in a brisk business-like manner.

"How well she does her work, bless her heart! she'll make a good little housekeeper," said the poor sick woman to herself.

And Madeline worked to such good purpose, that before long she had put everything straight in the little cottage ; her brothers were up and dressed, and sent to the door to play with the pet lamb. She herself put on her jacket, smoothed her hair, and sat down, rather tired, by her mother's bed to try to cheer her. But no cheering would do now ; poor Bridget had borne up as long as she could. She had struggled against this sickness for weeks, and her strength seemed ebbing fast.





THE GOOD LITTLE HOUSEKEEPER.

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## CHAP. II.—THE LITTLE HEIRESS.

**T**HIS Castle, not much more than a hundred yards from Bridget's cottage, lived another widow, Mrs. Tenassy by name. She was very rich, and those who did not know her thought she must be very happy. Passers-by, when they looked through the great iron gates up the avenue of old elm trees which led to the Castle, often said, "How delightful to live in such a place as that." They little thought how many tears were shed within those grey stone walls ; for money is not all that is wanted to make us happy ; money cannot buy a contented spirit worth all the riches in the world.

And why was the owner of this beautiful place not happy ? It was because Blanche,

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her only child, was an idle, discontented little girl. Mrs. Tenassy had had seven children, but all save Blanche were dead. She was "the little heiress," and some day the Castle and all that belonged to it would be hers. She had been tenderly watched and cared for ever since she was born, surrounded with love and overwhelmed with fondness, but she had come to take it all as a matter of course, and to think herself very much ill-used if crossed or corrected, and was consequently discontented and miserable.

Blanche had a good heart, and never willingly did harm to any living creature, but no child was ever more giddy and thoughtless. Incorrigibly inattentive and idle, she was, besides, so impatient of all control, that, at thirteen, she hardly even knew how to read, and was more ignorant than many a little girl of six.

This was the reason why Mrs. Tenassy was unhappy; nor could all her riches console her for her child's naughty, rebellious spirit. She had taken Blanche's education into her own

hands, but it was uphill work. The lesson-hours were a daily trouble to them both, and reproofs and punishments were the rule rather than the exception. Mrs. Tenassy felt the task becoming more hopeless every day. What was to be done? How was this discontented, idle little girl ever to grow into a reasonable woman? Lying and greediness excepted, she had every fault a child of her age could possibly have, and took no pains to overcome them. The morning of the day whereon my story opens had been more stormy even than usual. Blanche had not got up till long after she was called. This in itself was a bad beginning; and whilst she was saying her prayers, her eyes and thoughts were wandering round and round the room and up to the ceiling after the flies. She dawdled away an hour and a-half over her dressing, walked about the room in an aimless way, stopping twenty times with her sponge or comb in her hand to look out of the window, and talk to the birds as they flew in out of their nest in the turret. She washed herself as though she were afraid she should

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break, and combed her hair in a listless, absent way, as though she had nothing else to do all day. Meanwhile a little busy hand was mocking her—the hand of the clock was going its ceaseless rounds, and minutes were growing to hours, hours to days, days to months and years.

After breakfast Blanche took out her books to learn her lessons, or rather to yawn over them, as usual ; and, as usual, when called to repeat them to her mother, she blundered hopelessly, and then made no fewer than twenty mistakes in her dictation, easy though it was. Mrs. Tenassy was vexed, and scolded her severely, whereupon Blanche made things worse by giving her mother a very rude answer. Poor Mrs. Tenassy's patience was exhausted ; she had long felt that all her efforts to teach Blanche were unavailing ; for months past she had learnt absolutely nothing. Mrs. Tenassy, therefore, told her that in future she was to learn her lessons alone ; that since she had shown herself so indifferent to her mother's wishes, she must go her own way. Blanche began to cry ; she



TALKING TO THE BIRDS.



had sense enough to know that not only was her mother in earnest, but that she had brought this punishment on herself by her own naughtiness. Tears were of no avail now, for her mother felt that her faults could not be cured without suffering.





### CHAP. III.—THE NURSE'S ROOM.

**T**HREE was one room in the Castle where Blanche always took refuge when she had been naughty. This room was old Nanny's. Nanny had been Madame Tenassy's nurse, and had never left her from the moment of her birth. Now, in her old age, she was the object of Madame Tenassy's tenderest care and devotion, and nothing that could minister to her comfort was neglected.

And the old nurse's room was the quiet corner whither Blanche ran to hide herself whenever she had been naughty. There she poured out all her troubles, and when Nanny scolded her, as, alas ! she too often deserved to be scolded, she would listen, and mean to try and be good next time. Somehow the old

woman seemed to understand her better than any one else, and could help her, better even than her mother could, to feel how stubborn and disobedient she had been. Madame Tenassy knew this, and knowing too how well she could trust the faithful servant to give none but the best advice, was always glad when Blanche ran to unburden her heart in that quiet corner.

So now it was but a short while after the morning lessons had been brought to such a painful close, that Blanche slowly opened Nanny's door, crept in, looking half-sulky, half-ashamed, and, without saying a word, fetched a low stool which stood by the fireplace, and sat down at the old woman's feet. How quaint and snug the little room looked ; everything in it was a relic of the past, or a proof of Madame Tenassy's loving care for her faithful old friend. The pictures on the walls, the antique chest of drawers, the heavy-carved bedstead in the alcove, with its faded satin quilt, the Bible, and the well-stocked work-basket always at hand, nay, even that little

stool on which Blanche was sitting, had many a tale to tell of sorrow and of joy.

But why had Blanche, as she slipped into the room that morning, turned her eyes to the mantelpiece, and as quickly turned them away again, as though there were something there she dared not look at? A box stood on the mantelpiece; it was the box which made Blanche turn her eyes in that direction, and then turn them away again so suddenly; for she said to herself, "Nounou won't show me her treasure to-day, I know; so I shan't ask her."

"Nounou," as Blanche had always called her, was sitting in a large cushioned arm-chair by the window knitting, and when the door was pushed slowly open, her thoughts, as they often were, were far away in the past, busy with old memories of bygone days. She guessed at once, by Blanche's downcast look, that there had been a storm, and that some one had come to be scolded and made good again. For Nounou was generally the go-between, and her mission was to pour oil on the troubled waters. She was so quick-sighted,

and somehow, whilst upholding Madame Tenassy's authority, she could so well put herself in the child's place, could feel how wretched she felt when she was naughty, listen patiently to all she wanted to say, and then gently, and little by little, bring her round to see for herself that it was she who was in the wrong and no one else. Many children, ay, and grown-up children too, as they read this book, will think of some loving "Nounou" they once had to run to, and perhaps still have, to whom they would rather go for comfort when trouble comes than to any one else in the world, whose simple "never mind, child, it'll be better soon," is the best cure for every bruise and wound.

Blanche's wound that morning was very deep, and it took her a long time to tell her "Nounou" all about it; she kept back nothing of what had happened, but the last words were very, very hard to say.

"And now mother says she will never give me any lessons again!"

When Nounou heard that she took off her

spectacles, laid them down on the pincushion beside her, and looked very grave. For a few moments she said nothing ; she was wondering what she could do to put things straight. Those stormy lessons had long been a great worry to her too, and the growing want of sympathy between the two people she loved best on earth often made her heart ache.

But for all that not one sharp word escaped her now.

"Blanche dear," she gently said, "you'd like mother to be happy, wouldn't you ? and your old Nounou, you don't want to give her pain now she's old and weak, do you ? And yet do you know, dear, that mother and I are both very unhappy ?"

Blanche's heart was melted in an instant ; the old nurse's words made her feel very contrite.

"I know I've been naughty, very naughty, Nounou dear, but what am I to do ? for it seems almost as if mother didn't belong to me any more at all now."

And here Blanche burst into a flood of tears. Nanny took the girl on her lap, as she used to

take her mother in the old days, long ago, and said, in tender tones—

“I’m so sorry for you, darling ; and, as I don’t think you’ve ever been so unhappy in your life before, I’m going to tell you something that I’ve never told you yet, because I thought you too little; but you must listen very attentively.”

The girl’s face brightened with surprise and eagerness.

“Yes, I promise I’ll listen to every word, but I thought, Nounou, you had told me all your stories twenty times over.”

“No, one you’ve never heard yet, and I’m going to tell it you to-day, because I hope that if I tell you something to-day, when you’ve been so naughty, that I’ve never yet told any one else, it will help you to try and become a better girl in future.”

“First of all,” she went on, as rising she fetched the rosewood box from the mantelpiece, and sat down with it in her lap, “I’m going to shew you my treasure.”

“Oh ! but I’ve seen it a hundred times already,

Nounou—a lock of mother's hair, you mean, and one of your dear little girl's curls, who died when she was two years old, twisted together."

"That's not all, child; nobody's ever seen the rest but your dear mother. Sit down, Blanche, on your stool; I'm going to open my treasure-box, and show you all my secrets, every one." And saying this, she unlocked the box with a key she always wore hanging to a ribbon round her neck.

"There are my two angels' curls, bless them!" she said softly—"one is in Heaven with the Lord Jesus, quite happy; the other is still here, and her happiness rests with you. She is getting old now; she had seven children once; you are the youngest of all, and the only one left to love her. Do you wish to make her cry?"

"No, no! I don't want to make her cry," said Blanche earnestly, and her eyes filled with tears as she spoke; "but tell me what I'm to do; you know I asked you before."

"When you've seen Nounou's treasure, and listened to what she's going to tell you, then you'll know."

Nanny took out the tray, and Blanche saw underneath a little bit of green silk with a spot of blood on it, a few withered strawberry-leaves crumbling to powder, a tulip painted by an untaught hand, and a bunch of orange flowers.

"What funny-looking treasures," said she. Tell me, Nanny, what are they? Please do."

"Patience, patience, child! First my story, and then you'll understand everything."

And Nanny began as follows:—"I'm going to tell you a true story, a story about your mother."

"A story about mother! Oh! I am glad," cried Blanche; "and you know all about her, Nanny, don't you? because you've always lived with her."

"Yes; but if I tell it you it is that you may try to grow like her; you know I said I had had two angels. Yes, your mother is an angel of goodness, Blanche. Well, I begin——"

At the words "I begin," a scream was heard at the foot of the stairs.

"Mrs. Nanny! Mrs. Nanny! Quick! oh

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quick! A blanket!—a big blanket!—the kitchen chimney's on fire!"

"They'll be setting the whole place on fire next, careless creatures," muttered the old woman, in a very different tone from that in which she had been speaking to Blanche a minute before. "Servants are enough to drive one silly nowadays."

She quickly put everything back into the box, locked it, and bustled off to the kitchen with a large blanket—first to scold, and then to help to put out the fire.

Nanny was not a favourite with the other servants; they were young, and sometimes giddy; she was old, and often cross with them; she had no patience with their flighty ways, and often took upon herself to scold—seldom, it must be owned, without good reason—but that made it all the more aggravating; they could not forgive her for being in the right, and so "Nanny's always cross" was the unvarying comment, instead of "Nanny's old and weakly; she means well, and we must bear with her," which it should have been.



THE KITCHEN CHIMNEY ON FIRE.





#### CHAP. IV.—BRIDGET'S TWO PENCE.

“ **W**ALK in, ladies and gentlemen, walk in ;  
the show's just a-going to begin. Two-pence admission ; only twopence, ladies and gentlemen ! ” These words were repeated over and over again, at least a hundred times every quarter of an hour, by a persistent voice at the door of the giant's tent, whilst at the stall close by, where combs, looking-glasses, brushes, &c., were spread out in tempting array, a woman attracted the passers-by by cries of “ Twopence, only twopence ; pay your money, and take your choice.” From time to time some one stopped, and, after steadily eyeing the goods for a few minutes, paid his money, took his choice, and passed on. Presently a little girl of thirteen came up, and also stopped,

but only to look ; she was too poor to buy. The big loaf under her arm, and the pint of new milk in an earthen jar for the lamb : those were all her purchases for the day, and yet there were five of them at home. Madeline always said—

“ We are five, counting Loulou.”

Loulou was the lamb, Madeline’s pet and plaything ; more than that even, her little friend.

Madeline’s face, which had brightened at the first sight of the gay market-place, soon resumed its former sad look—a look the face of a child of her age does not often wear. She seemed neither to hear nor see the urgent invitation of the man at the door of the tent to come in and behold the wonders : “ the incomparable giant, strong as Hercules, quiet as a lamb ; the two-headed calf from the shores of the Baltic ; the great sea-serpent, who could wet his tongue in the English Channel whilst his tail was in the Pyrenees. Walk in, ladies and gentlemen, walk in. Admission only twopence ! ”

Only twopence ! Madeline held twopence



**TEMPTATION RESISTED.**



in her hand, and heard every word the man said, but she walked hurriedly on.

“This way, little ladies and gentlemen, this way ; all these toys for twopence. Pay your money, and take your choice. Twopence ! All for twopence !”

Poor Madeline ! Everything seemed to cost twopence that morning, and hers seemed to be burning a hole in her hand as she passed that tempting tray of wooden dolls, tops, animals, and balls. Her heart was very full, but she thought, “I’m mother’s little housekeeper ;” and, looking neither to the right nor to the left, soon reached home.

“Mother,” she said as she opened the door, and went up to her mother’s bedside, “I’ve bought the bread and the milk, and here are two pennies left.”

“Put them in the white cup, child, for they’re all I’ve got.”

“All you’ve got ! then what’ll we do to-morrow ?”

“I hope the baker will trust us when he knows I’m sick ; if not, God sees us, Madeline,

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doesn't He ? Why should we be afraid ? Remember who it was that said, 'Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they ?'"

"I know," said Madeline earnestly ; "and last Sunday, in his sermon, the Vicar said that God hears His children when they cry to Him for help. What must I do to be a child of God to-day, mother ? tell me."

"Try to feel that it is God who sends us these troubles—that it is His will that we should be poor, and ask Him to help you to say with all your heart, 'Thy will be done.' Then don't think about the fair and all its pleasures, nor the loss of the promised holiday ; give them up cheerfully with a brave spirit. All this is not easy at your age, is it ?"

"I've been trying to do it just now, and it nearly made me cry."

"God is not angry with us for crying if we do not murmur or complain."

"Go on, mother ; what must I do next ?"

"Mind the little ones, take the sickle and cut grass for the rabbits by the roadside, and nurse mother till she is well."

"That's all quite easy," said Madeline, joyfully. "I only wish—oh ! you don't know how I wish—I could earn some money for you. Couldn't I now, really ?"

"My poor child, you're not thirteen yet."

"That's no matter ; but never mind, I know what I'll do."

The sick woman only smiled, and Madeline went on with her work.

Meanwhile there was no end of fun going on outside, and the whole village was astir, enjoying itself. The alarm of fire at the Castle turned out a very short interruption to the general merriment ; only the kitchen chimney had caught fire, and the servants had come to the rescue at once.

Presently, amid the sound of music and laughter, Madeline thought she heard a knock at the door ; she opened it, and found an old man standing there, who held out his hat, and asked for alms "for the love of God."

What could she give him ? Nothing. And Madeline cast down her eyes, for she did not like having to tell him to go away.

"Madeline," said her mother, "come here ;" then in a low voice, as the girl stooped down to her, she whispered—

"We've only two pence left ; but what think you, child—shouldn't we give them to him 'for the love of God' ? "

"Oh, yes, yes ! do let's," said Madeline eagerly, and ran and took them out of the white cup on the shelf, and put them into the old man's hand with a beaming smile.

"God will reward you, my little dear, and sooner than you think," said the beggar, as he turned from the door, and continuing his way through the village he stopped at other doors, but no one else had time to notice him ; they were all too busy amusing themselves.

On reaching the Castle gates, he stopped again. Nanny happened to be standing there with Blanche, and took out the customary dole of twopence, which, by Mrs. Tenassy's orders,

every poor wayfarer asking alms at the Castle gates was to receive.

"Thank you, good ladies," said the old man ; "people are all so happy here they can't give a thought to poor folk like me."

"Oh, that's only because of the fair to-day ; you see it comes but once a-year ; there's some excuse if their heads are a bit turned," said the nurse smiling.

"It wasn't true, though," rejoined the man, "that nobody took any notice of me ; they gave me twopence down at that cottage yonder, and I heard them, as I stood at the door, saying—"

"What ?" asked Blanche, interrupting him.  
"What were they saying ?"

"I wasn't meant to hear, little lady, but though I'm old I've got sharp ears, and they were sad words the woman whispered to the girl—very sad they were."

And he went on to tell them what he had overheard the sick woman saying to her child so softly, that she thought he would not hear.

"Only two pence left, and give them away !

How good of them!" cried Blanche with surprise.

" You're right there, miss, it was good, and no mistake; and believe me, Providence will send an angel to reward them—that He will."

Blanche took a piece of money from her purse, and gave it to the man; his story had made them friends, and she felt as if, like Madeline, she must do something for him. He thanked her and turned to go; and, as she and Nanny went back to the Castle, she said in a contrite and humble tone—

" Nounou dear, perhaps, if I was good, God would send me to help those poor people, but I don't suppose He will, as I'm naughty."

" Wait a bit, child," returned the nurse; " I'll go on with my story to-morrow, and then we'll see if you may help them."





## CHAP. V.—MOTHER'S HISTORY.

**T**HE day after the fair, Blanche, still very subdued by the recollection of what had happened, went as soon as she was dressed to Nanny's room, and reminded her of her promise.

Nanny laid down her knitting, took off her spectacles, settled herself, as if she never meant to move again, in her big arm-chair, and began :—

“ One day, long ago, on a Saturday in May, there was great rejoicing here in the Castle; it was fine and warm, and the birds were singing. A little child had been born that morning early, before the sun was up; the little child was your mother and my daughter, Blanche. I say my daughter, because she always seemed to belong more to me than to any one else in the world; I

was her nurse, that was why, you know—but you can't understand, not if you were to try ever so. I had a child of my own, too, once—a little girl; I had to give her up, poor pet; all that by rights was hers I had to give to a stranger. Nurses often have to do this. But what am I talking about? How should you understand why it must be? I don't myself.

"My mistress—she was your grandmother, Blanche, do you understand?—wanted Mary to be the baby's name, but the Count liked Athenaïs better; he fancied the name, why I can't tell; so she was christened Mary Athenaïs, and called Athenaïs; sometimes we called her Mary, just in play—we two, my lady and I—when no one else was by. My dear mistress, she was a born lady, and no mistake, and full of life and spirits. Many and many's the time she'd come and sit by the cradle with me for a laugh and a chat.

"And the precious darling grew! I never saw a baby grow so fast as our baby did, and crow and laugh so pretty, and clap her hands

when she opened her eyes in the morning, and saw me standing there beside the cradle. But all this time terrible troubles were coming on our land, and wicked men were plotting against the laws, and planning how to vex God and do harm to others. I can't tell you all about that now, it's too sad ; some day you'll read about it in books ; they call it the Revolution, and oh ! the misery it brought—the churches were shut, houses were pillaged and burned, and people dragged off to prison. Many had their heads cut off ; your grandfather, Blanche, among the number."

"Nounou, how dreadful !"

"Yes, and that's why your dear mother has that sad look in her eyes that makes her face so beautiful, people say. How fast she grew ; how plump and rosy she was. There was never anything amiss with her, never.

"And all this time the Revolution went on spreading and spreading till nobody felt safe, either in town or country, and many families left their homes and fled for dear life across the frontier, or over the sea to England. We fol-

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lowed too, before long, for the terror had begun to spread our way, and the name of our Countess was hated for her good deeds, and the love her husband had borne the King and his family. All this time I had my own troubles, quite apart from our lady's ; not but what hers were mine too for all that, but what I mean is, that my trouble was mine alone. Of course, how should it matter to anybody else that my own precious pet—my very own baby, I mean—went to heaven. God knew it was best so—best for us both. Poor little Jacqueline ! there was no place for her anywhere but up there in heaven with the angels."

" Dear Nounou, why do you cry when it's so long ago ? Jacqueline's been dead a great long while now, hasn't she ? "

" It doesn't seem long to me, child ; may be it is, but I'm getting old, and I forget. Let's see, Jacqueline would have been fifty now, wouldn't she ? "

" Please go on, Nounou ; I want to hear all about mother. Won't you ? "

" Wait a minute, I've dropped a stitch ; and

pick up my ball—there it is, rolled into the corner—there's a good child.

“Let's see now—where was I ?” said Nanny, as she passed her hand over her eyes.

“Oh yes, to be sure, I remember now ; it was when we were in Italy ; my poor lady, she fretted so, and we were very poor ; there were just we three, and she fell sick from grief and worry, and grew weaker and weaker, and more and more sad, till at last nothing was able to rouse her—even the child couldn't make her smile. Years went by, and brought no change in her condition ; my heart ached to see her. Athenaïs was too young to wonder or think it strange ; she fancied all mothers were like hers ; but still, by the time she was eight, she had more sense than many girls of twelve or thirteen.”

“You say that because you're thinking of me now, I'm sure, Nounou ; aren't you ?”

“Why, I didn't mention any names, did I ? But I must get on, or you'll be tired of listening. At home in France things went from bad to worse, as far as we could hear ; our home here

was sold 'for a song,' as the saying goes—next to nothing, that means—because everything then was topsy-turvy. As for us, do what we would, the money went—God knows there was no waste—what I mean is, I made it go as far as ever I could ; but bit by bit all the plate was sold, and the jewels, too, we had brought away in our flight. Whatever my lady wanted she had—all the comforts and all the consolation her unhappy state required ; and to whom did she owe them all ? Listen ; to whom, think you ? Why, to her child, to my little Athenais—your mother, Blanche. There were other French folks in the place where we lived—one great and noble family, who had been obliged, like us, to fly from their home, and take refuge among strangers. There was the grandfather, the mother, and five young ladies. By-and-by Athenais got to know them ; they were just the best friends my child could have had, and taught her all that I in my poor way had been trying too to teach her. They had no servant, and did all the work themselves ; I see them now, dusting, sweeping, keeping everything in their

little household in perfect order, and with it all they were ladies still to the backbone ; it seemed as if the rough work couldn't make even their hands hard, and I'm sure their hearts were as tender and as full of love for every living creature—of pity for every one that was in trouble—as could be. They had invented a hundred ways of earning money, for they were poor too, and knew what want was as well as we. One of them made preserves for sale, another orange-flower water; Countess Germaine and Countess Jeanne taught French and singing, whilst the youngest of all made dainty little pincushions, slippers, watch-pockets, and such like, and sold them in the town at the foot of the hill where invalids from England came to spend the winter. And they and Athenäis were great friends, though they were lively and merry, and she was, as she always had been, quiet and rather melancholy. Poor child ! no wonder ; we two, her sick mother and I, had been her only company so long.

“One day, her mother, who was full of fancies, as sick people always are, had a sudden

longing for some strawberries; nothing else would satisfy her; and downright vexed she was, poor lady, because we wouldn't, she said, give her what she asked for. Wouldn't! I remember how bitterly Athenaïs cried that morning because we couldn't get her any, for we had no money. Now listen to what she did; your mother it is I'm speaking of now, Blanche.

"I found her sitting on her little bed that night with a lot of clumsy little pincushions on her lap, covered with old scraps of coloured ribbon and rag cut from her doll's clothes, and stuffed with wool which she had pulled out of her mattress. Think of that; she was only ten then, and working for her mother in secret."

"Why, were the pincushions for grandmother, Nounou?"

"Yes; the darling meant to go and sell them next day, she said, and buy strawberries for her mother. It would be easy enough, she thought; she had seen others selling pincushions in the town often. She had pricked her poor finger over one of them, and spotted the cover

with blood, so that she had to make another for it. I have treasured it ever since, that little bit of faded green silk, stained with her blood —it's part of Nanny's treasure that nobody ever sees."

As she said this, her voice trembled; she laid the rag on Blanche's lap, and in a grave tone added, "She was ten then, your mother; she doesn't ask you to do as much as that for her, and the little she asks you will not do."

The child hung her head, and two big tears rolled down her cheeks. Nanny appeared not to notice them, and continued her story.

"When the pincushions were finished, Athenaïs made me go with her to her friends, and ask Countess Emily, the youngest, to sell them with hers. She could hardly help smiling at first when she saw the pincushions, but when I took her aside and told her all about it, she was enchanted, and ran to tell the whole story to her grandfather. He was a dear, kind old gentleman, with courtly manners, such as people used to have long ago. He made no answer, but smiled rather sadly,

and soon after left the room and went out. In a quarter of an hour he came back with a basket of lovely strawberries, and, giving them to Athenais, told her to take them to her mother. The basket was lined with leaves—here they are; don't touch them, or they'll fall to pieces. And so your grandmother had her strawberries; they had cost her little girl some drops of blood, some hours of sleep, and some of the stuffing of her one mattress, and the old Count something besides, I know; for there, too, as in our house, the means were small and the wants many."

"Oh, Nounou! I like that story so much; it'll help to make me good. Please go on, do."

"Athenais was growing a big girl; I had begun to teach her to read, and later on the young Countesses used to give her lessons, for I was never much of a scholar. She could read the Bible, and knew a deal of it by heart, and her Catechism, too, quite well. She could sew, too, very neatly, and helped me with all my work, as though she were twice her age, that, when the Countess Emily entreated



THE BASKET OF STRAWBERRIES.



that Athenaïs might be confirmed with her, there seemed no reason against it; she was full young, to be sure, but had long ago become a child of God. The confirmation made quite a little woman of her; nothing would satisfy her but she must get some work to do. A kind neighbour of ours, an Italian woman of the village, taught her to wash and iron the frilled muslin kerchiefs and full-gathered sleeves which people wore in those days; and somehow she caught the knack—they were fidgetty things to iron—and got them up so beautifully that the great English ladies didn't like theirs done by any one else but her. Of course they did not know who she was, and spoke of her always as 'the little French girl who works for her sick mother.'

"In this way we got on quite nicely by degrees, and all your grandmother's wants were supplied; even luxuries we could often get her, which cheered and pleased her. And bit by bit the dark cloud which had hung over her passed away, and though she could not leave her room, hardly her bed, a sweet

gentleness and contentment breathed in every look and word, and repaid us for all our care ; and then at last—one evening in October it was—she passed away so quietly, so calm she slept the sleep of death. On the day she left us she was so bright and cheerful. I got her up as usual to make her bed after sunset. She said she was not tired sitting while I did it, and got into bed quite as well as usual, and in fact better. After she was comfortably settled, Countess Emily called to see her, and sat and talked, and read a chapter to her, and my lady seemed so pleased, and looked so bright, we could not help noticing. After the young Countess was gone, I took our little night-lamp and drew the curtain. She said, ‘I shall lay my head down now ; I have kept it up a good while.’ I said, ‘Do ; I will bring your supper presently,’ which supper was a cup of coffee. She said, ‘Very well, but don’t put any bread in it to-night.’ I took it up in a short time, but she was, as I thought, fast asleep. I spoke to her, but no answer ; she looked in such a beautiful sleep ; so I waited a few minutes,

then tried to rouse her gently, but all in vain. I called Athenaïs, who bent over her, and, looking at me, said, ‘Yes, she is in a sound sleep, from which she will never awake in this world.’ My dear Blanche, though I had been expecting it, I may almost say for years, I cannot tell you the shock it gave me ; I seemed so stupid, I could not believe it. We laid her in the graveyard on the hill-side under the cypresses, a stranger among strangers ; but never mind, I trust the freed spirit is with God, eternally shut in.” And the old woman was silent ; her thoughts had slipped back to that last evening—that quiet graveyard among strangers, where the mistress she had so lovingly tended rested from all her pain.

Blanche was very still ; she was thinking of her mother and of her pain.

“ After her mother was dead, Athenaïs had only one thought—she was afraid she hadn’t done all she might have done for her. It’s always so when we lose those we love ; we think, ‘Oh ! if we had only been different ; if we had only not vexed them then—and then—

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and then ; if we had done what they asked us that day, and many other days besides. If we had tried to please them better ; and now it's too late !' God knows, Athenaïs had no cause to reproach herself, but who does the utmost that he can will at times do more."

Blanche was listening with rapt attention, and seemed to ponder every word as Nanny went on.

" And we two lived on as before ; nothing was changed, except that she was gone. We kept the same hours, and did just as we used to do always—going every morning to church, doing our work, and having our dinner at four. Athenaïs tried hard to make me sit down at the table with her ; we had a little fight about that, for I wouldn't give in. I was the servant, and knew how to keep my place, and she soon saw it was no use trying to make me change my mind. Bless her heart ! nobody will ever love her as I do."

" Well, Nounou, and what did you do in the evening ? Go on."

" Yes, to be sure—where was I ? I keep

forgetting I'm telling you a story. Oh yes, I remember. After dinner then, when I had done my washing up, we started, she to go to the 'Strawberry Count'—I always called him so ; his real name was—dear, I've forgotten, my memory's so bad. I always called him the Strawberry Count in my heart, and our hearts never grow old."

"And you, Nanny, what did you do then ?"

"I went to our neighbour the washer-woman, or took a walk, or went to church sometimes ; the church was always open, and I liked to go and sit where I could see the flowers on the altar and the beautiful coloured windows above, and hear the organ playing, and rest. Meanwhile, Athenaïs was safe and happy with her friends, and would tell me when I went to fetch her home all that she had been doing, from the very beginning, every little thing that had happened. They taught her to paint, amongst other things, and the first flower she painted—a tulip it was, and a deal of trouble and time it cost her—was a birthday present for me. I was so pleased that I burst into tears,

which made her think it was badly done. She's painted many since—the roses, the lilies, and the daffodils that hang in the drawing-room in beautiful gilt frames, are all by her, and visitors admire them and praise them, but her first tulip, no one has seen that but me. Dear! how good she was to me, and so grateful for everything; yet I did no more than my duty, and if it hadn't been that I felt homesick now and then I should have been quite happy.

"As time went on we heard that France was growing quiet again, and that the people were beginning to go back to their homes. I often wondered how it would be with us. At last, after many letters to and fro, we learned that this castle, where we are now, had fallen into good hands, and would be given up to its rightful owners if they ever came back to claim it. This was news indeed, and I was nearly beside myself with joy.

The old Count, who had written all our letters for us, was on the point of setting out for France with his family, and so it was

settled that we were all to go together. The money for the journey was ready, laid by bit by bit through all those years of banishment, in a purse I have still. By the time your mother took possession of her rightful home, there was one florin left of our hard-earned savings. That florin and the purse I have kept ever since, and when I am dead they will pass into the hands of those I love best in the world."

"Whose?" enquired Blanche innocently; "I'm the only child you've got."

"Just so, and they will belong to you, and you will treasure them as I have done. Hear the end of my story first, though."

"All right; I'm listening."

"Our joy was great when we found ourselves back in France, for there's no place like home, and France was home to all of us. I went with Athenaïs straight to an elderly lady, a cousin of her father's; the Count—he was the one who helped us in everything—had found out she was still alive. She received us so ungraciously, as much as to say she had

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rather we had never come back, that I was beside myself with indignation, and determined, whatever happened, she should have nothing to do with Athenaïs. How things would ever come right I could not think. Come right they did, however—none the more for that—and all owing to your mother's sweet, gentle ways. We were lodging in a small house in the town four miles from here, whilst the old Count was looking after your mother's affairs. The Tenassys, the family in whose hands this castle then was, heard a deal about Athenaïs, of course, from him—he often spoke of her devotion to her mother, the hard-working life she had led—so that she soon became a subject of interest to them, even though they did not know her. All of a sudden I fell sick, so sick they thought I was going to die. The Tenassys heard of it—no doubt it was our old friend the Count who told them—and came to see me, madam and her son, a fine young gentleman of just twenty. There's no need to tell you more; that I didn't die you know, and that Mr. Tenassy married Athenaïs you know too, since

he was your own father ; but what you do not know is that she said she would not consent to become his wife unless he would promise that her home should be mine too as long as I lived. And so it came to pass that we went back to the old home, and for a few happy years were all together again ; then God called my master away, too soon as it seemed to us ; for His ways are not our ways. There, I'm crying again ; I cannot help the tears ; they come each time I think of him. But you, child, what's the matter ?”

“ I'm so sorry, Nounou.”

“ What for ?”

“ Because mother ought to have a good child to make up.”

“ So she might, if the wilful, naughty, idle little Blanche would turn into a good, unselfish, diligent Blanche.”

“ I never could, Nounou ; it would be easier to get another at once.”

“ But she wants her own Blanche—no other will do instead, she has suffered so much ; she had seven children, and God took them all

away one by one, all but you, and then He took your father away too, and left her quite alone, with only one little treasure to comfort her. You were that little treasure, child, and you do not comfort her."

"Don't say that; I will be different, really and truly I will. Is the story finished?"

"Yes, all there is of it so far; you have to make the ending; let it be a happy ending, to make up for all the sad parts there have been in it, and some day, if you only try, you'll grow like her. How sweet she looked on her wedding day! Very quiet, because she was thinking of her mother, who was not there to bless her, but quite, quite happy. That evening she called me to her room, and gave me her wedding nosegay. That nosegay I have treasured these forty years; all that time I have never shown it to anybody; it was sacred to her and me. See that you never lose one of those faded flowers; you must leave them in the box as they lie—untouched and undisturbed, as in my heart for ever!"

Old Nanny ceased, and all was quiet in the

room ; the sun was shining on Blanche's head, and into the precious box, lighting up the soft brown hair and the treasured memories of bygone days. We shall see how the promise which first broke the stillness, given in low and earnest tones as Blanche reverently closed the box, was kept in days to come.





## CHAP. VI.—THE LAMB IS SOLD TO THE BUTCHER.

**H**AVE we not all again and again felt that in great trials, as in great joys, the details, the small accessories, are what affect us most—cause us the keenest pain or pleasure? We cannot grasp the sum, but the items come home to us at once.

Madeline's lamb had been the small pleasure of her life; it had its own special corner in her loving heart, it fed from her hand, and followed her wherever she went; and now it must be sold to the butcher! Poor Loulou! poor Madeline! Her mother had often told her that poor people could not afford to get fond of their animals; she was to be kind to the lamb and treat it well, but never to forget that the butcher must have it in the end. And now the end had come, and was harder even than she had ex-

pected it would be, for she must take it to the butcher herself, and ask him whether it was fat enough to kill, and what he would give for it. There was nothing in the house—the baker had given them credit for three or four days, but with those half-muttered asides which make favours so hard to accept. Bridget was no better, and terribly cast down. Pride was her fault; she hid her misery from the eyes of others, and could not bear that her richer neighbours should know how destitute she was; and now she suffered cruelly.

It is needless to say, Mrs. Tenassy, who had heard the old beggar's story from Nanny, had sent the faithful servant down to the cottage at once, to find out the true state of things, and ascertain what help was needed. Nanny was delighted to go; but the sick woman gave such a cheerful account of herself, and made so light of her troubles, that Nanny had not dared to suggest any more substantial help than a few delicacies, such as beef-tea, jelly, or wine, which might tempt the appetite of an invalid, who had no one but an inexperienced child to cook

for her. In the most guarded and discreet way Nanny tried to penetrate Bridget's reserve, but without success. Bridget spoke of having means at her command to which she was just intending to have recourse, but volunteered no further information on the subject, so that Nanny did not like to press the point, and told Mrs. Tenassy, on her return, that she had not liked to offer her money, for fear of wounding her feelings. By the means at her command she, of course, meant Loulou, Madeline's little friend ; he had been lying under the table all the time in happy ignorance of his approaching fate ; though he did not understand what Bridget said, Madeline did, and nearly burst into tears.

When Nanny was gone, her mother said, "It'll be a long while before I am able to work, and you must make up your mind to it at once; it must have happened anyhow, sooner or later, do you understand ?"

"Yes, mother," replied Madeline, and the words seemed to stick in her throat, so low was her answer. But she loved her mother so un-

selfishly, that by a great effort she managed to hide at least half her grief.

“When will you go to the butcher’s?”

“Whenever you like, mother.”

“The sooner the better, dear; he has no doubt sold a great deal of meat this week, on account of the fair, and is very likely to have run short, so now’s your best time. I know it’s a great sacrifice, but then, you remember, we were only bringing it up to sell it.”

“I know that, mother; and you often say that poor people can only afford to have useful things. I’m a little sorry, of course, but I’ll go at once.”

She got up and went out. It was a beautiful sunny day—the lamb’s last day. Poor creature! His little mistress called to him in the usual manner—why not? Oughtn’t she to make him as happy as she could, now that his life was so soon to end? He came directly, expecting to be fondled, or to have some milk given him to drink, and rubbed himself confidently against her; it cost her a fresh pang, but she walked steadily on, the lamb after her.

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The moment, however, she caught sight of the butcher's roof at the bend of the road, her sobs choked her ; she sat down by the stream, at a place where the grass was thick and green, where she had often come to let the lamb graze, whilst she and her brothers fished for minnows in the stream. The daisies and bluebells looked sadly at her ; she fancied they must be sorry for Loulou. Her mother could not hear her crying now, she was sure, and she began to cry bitterly. The lamb stood and looked at her, as if he wanted to know what was the matter.

"I cannot help it, Loulou, I really cannot ; I must do it for mother's sake. I wouldn't do it else, that you must know ; I should keep you always, and never let anybody hurt you ; but there's nothing at home to eat, and mother will die if I do not do it."

And the poor child's tears fell thick and fast on the unsuspecting little victim, who had lain down at her feet. Great was her surprise when, on lifting up her head, she saw the young lady from the castle and Nanny, both looking at her with the greatest pity and concern.



SALE OF THE PET LAMB.



“What’s the matter ?” said Blanche.

“Nothing, miss,” answered Madeline, quickly drying her eyes as she spoke. “I’m going on now, or I shall be late ; I’ve got a commission to do for mother.”

“Where are you going ?” asked Nanny in a decided tone ; “to the butcher’s to sell that lamb ?”

Hearing the cause of her grief—cause which she had hardly dared own to herself—put into plain words, the girl’s courage completely gave way, and she cried with all her heart.

Blanche stroked the lamb’s head, and said—

“Surely he will not kill it, if it makes you cry so.”

“Yes, yes, he must !” exclaimed Madeline, with a violent effort to command herself.

“You don’t care about the lamb, then ?” continued Blanche, not understanding how much the least of us can do and suffer if we only try.

“Yes indeed, I do !” Madeline said, raising her voice ; “but I care more about mother ;” and then, quickly knotting her handkerchief round the lamb’s neck, she led it away.

Blanche was so surprised she did not move.

"Why does she do it, Nanny? tell me."

"I know," said Nanny; "when I was talking with Bridget the day before yesterday, she spoke as if she didn't want any help from us, because of something she was going to do herself, she didn't tell me what; but now I see—it was selling the lamb she was thinking of. Poor child, how fond she is of it too, and nevertheless she's taking it to the butcher's to be killed, and had stopped here on the way to cry. It's her duty, and she's doing it because it is her duty."

"I didn't know there were such unhappy people as that, Nounou. I'm so sorry for her. If mother weren't so angry with me, I should go and ask her to prevent the butcher from killing the lamb."

"Your mother can't do that if the butcher buys it. Bridget wants money—that's what it is."

"If I had any," cried Blanche, "I'd give it all to her, every penny; but I've only five shillings. That's not enough!"

“ How is it that that’s all you’ve got ? ”

“ Why, you know, don’t you ? it’s because I wouldn’t do my lessons, and mother, to punish me, wouldn’t give me my proper allowance this month ; five shillings is all I have left from last month. Oh dear ! if she would only believe me when I say I’ll be good ; if she would only let me do my lessons with her again ; but when I asked her to, she didn’t even answer.”

“ And why ? Why, because she remembered that you had said the same thing over and over again, at least a hundred times, and to no purpose. She can’t believe you any more, you see. She doesn’t know that I’ve told you her history, and that you really mean to be a good girl now.”

“ Then will you tell her about it, Nounou, and ask her to let me be her own little girl again, and forgive me just this once—to give me my lessons again, and scold me even. It’s too dreadful when she doesn’t speak to me, and looks vexed all day long ! ”

“ Listen, Blanche ; I will speak to her about

you, but only because I do really hope that you will never make her so unhappy again, and will try to follow Madeline's example, and love your mother as you see she does hers.

"I promise you I will. I'll try as hard as ever I can, you'll see, Nounou. And please ask mother, if I promise to be good, to let me give Madeline her lamb back."

"Which means that you're to have the pleasure of doing good without any sacrifice of your own! Nay; there's little merit in doing good if it costs you nothing yourself. Begin by being good, and then perhaps God will show you the way to be of use to others."

"I'll try, Nounou. But speak to mother directly—this very evening; promise?"

"Yes, this very evening."

"And the lamb mightn't, perhaps, have to be killed after all, Nounou, do you think?"





## CHAP. VII.—DAME NIXON.

HAVE you ever seen a village gossip trotting in and out of her neighbours' cottages with her budget of news, adding to it here a bit and there a bit, and seasoning her stories as she goes? Dame Nixon was inimitable, with her coloured kerchief tied round her head, the ends knotted in front, her brown jacket, and bright striped petticoat. She was like the fly in La Fontaine's fable, who thought he was drawing the waggon up the hill, and that the horses and the waggoner had nothing at all to do with it.

Dame Nixon loved gossip beyond everything. If she wanted three ounces of cheese and a couple of ounces of sugar, she would never get both at the same time, but make two journeys to the shop, letting an hour or two elapse between, and stopping each time to have a crack

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with the watchman by the way, in the hopes of gleaning some scrap of news in exchange for a pinch of snuff. The watchman always took the snuff, but his words were few ; which often angered the dame, who would rather invent three stories than keep the half of one to herself. Being rather clever, and generally inclined to do her neighbours a service—if only for the sake of exercise and experiencing new sensations—she was naturally everybody's friend ; on the strength of which she was minutely acquainted with everything that went on in the village, and even kept an eye on the Castle and Vicarage. So that, when any one betrayed ignorance with regard to an accident, a christening, or a marriage, as the case might be, the invariable comment was, “ You haven’t seen Dame Nixon, then ? ”

This good soul was Bridget’s next-door neighbour, and Bridget, though she lamented the inconveniences, often said that it was better to have her for a friend than an enemy ; wisely too, for if it was true that Dame Nixon would walk into the fire for her friends, it was no less



THE PINCH OF SNUFF.



true that she would, if opportunity offered, throw her enemies into it. Her tongue ran away with her. She was excessively credulous, as country-folk mostly are ; and the more incredible a story was, the more ready she was to believe it. She loved talking ill of people, not exactly because she was wicked, but for the pleasure of gossiping.

Coming back one morning with her daily pint of milk, half for herself and half for her cat, she caught sight of the nurse on the other side of the road.

“Good day, Mrs. Nanny ; the weather’s spoiling ; we shall have rain, I expect.”

“Very likely, Dame Nixon. I hope I see you well, ma’am.”

“So, so. And the little lady ? She’s growing finely, I say !”

“Thank God, yes ; she’s just at the growing age now.”

“She’s growing pretty, too ; she favours her mamma. Pity she’s so naughty !”

“Naughty ! who says she’s naughty, I’d like to know ? Quite the contrary, she’s very good.”

"How stupid people are, then. I declare, if a woman—the cousin of the mother of my nephew who married his godmother's daughter—didn't go and say that madam's face was growing graver and greyer every day, all along of being worried morning, noon, and night with little missy!"

"You shouldn't listen to such tales, then," rejoined the nurse, haughtily; "no notice should be taken of people who say such things. Miss Blanche has her faults, of course, like every one else, but she'll cure herself of them in time; and her heart's as good as gold, she wouldn't hurt a fly. Trust me, I ought to know if any one ought. She'll be the image of her mamma."

"Never, now surely! she looks so cross and surly."

"Well, it's early days still to judge; she's growing, and children will be children, remember. Wait till she's confirmed; then you'll see!"

"All right; of course it can't matter to me."

"Yes, and you can tell all the gossips that our young lady has a kind heart—that just

now, at this very moment, she's thinking of nothing but how she can do a good action. Yesterday she saw little Madeline crying——”

“ Madeline! Ah! to be sure, her mother's ill, very ill ; she's in a bad way.”

“ Has she seen the doctor ?”

“ No ; but I've taken her a horse-shoe I picked up by the way ; it's a famous cure for fever, for toothache, and the rheumatics, and no end of other things. You must put it in your mattress, that's all : it's safe to cure you if you don't die first.”

“ For all that, if I had to choose between a good doctor and a good horse-shoe, I should choose the doctor, I think.”

“ Not I. But to return to Madeline : they're in terrible want down there ;” and she pointed with her thumb towards the cottage.

“ Indeed ! No one would ever have guessed it.”

“ No, sure ; Mother Bridget's pride beats all I ever saw. She hides everything. I could tell you a thing or two about them, poor things, if I chose. They're on the high road to the

workhouse if ever a family was. The children can't earn a penny yet, nor will for ever so long; there's only Madeline, but bless us, there's a girl for work, of the right sort too, nothing's too hard for her. And sense!—she's sense enough for three, and clever as a monkey. Says she to me yesterday—'Dame Nixon,' says she, 'I'd like to grow big all at once in the night.'

"'Dear heart,' says I, 'what cramps you'd have.'

"'Never mind,' says she, 'if I was big, and had some money, I should keep a little shop; I should buy all sorts of things wholesale and sell retail, and gain two or three pence on every article.'"

"Did the girl say that, really? Who knows, if she has a turn for trade, with a little help she might get on."

"Says I to her, 'Go along, child, you're down now, and down you'll stay; there's no chance for you.'"

"And is that how you encouraged her, Dame Nixon? Well, it's my belief that child

will prosper, and will be earning her own livelihood, and her family's too, before very long."

"Tut, tut! Mistress Nanny, rich folks are too hard-hearted; they'd be very sorry to help the poor."

"Or rather, dame, say they and the poor don't know each other enough. If the one had more trust, and the other more love, there wouldn't be so much misery in the world. On the other hand, if the young girls of our class would be content to be simple and moderate in their tastes, we shouldn't see them spending all their earnings on dress; they'd lay by something to set up house with later on; they'd clothe their children decently, not deck them out like dolls; and everything would go better."

"Well, you're right, I dare say, Mistress Nanny, you're so wise—from living with the great folk all your life, I suppose. Meanwhile, it'll need a long arm to help Madeline out of her misery."

"We shall see. Good day, Dame Nixon."

"Good day, mistress; we must be off, the storm's coming; we shall just get home in time."



## CHAP. VIII.—THE NURSE'S HISTORY.

**U**P at the Castle, mother and daughter had not spoken to each other for four days. Blanche was miserable, and her beseeching looks testified how earnestly she longed to be forgiven. Her mother suffered even more than she did, and on the evening of the fourth day she yielded to those appealing eyes and called Blanche to her, saying affectionately, "My darling, I will trust you."

Upon which Blanche, her eyes brimming over with tears, threw herself on her mother's lap, and, clasping her arms round her neck, kissed her again and again.

"To show that I mean to trust you," said Mrs. Tenassy, quietly, "I am going to tell you a story, a true story about some one you know and love, some one you can never love enough, I mean nurse."

"A story about Nounou!"

"Yes. Example is a great thing ; when we say to ourselves so and so was able to do that, we naturally begin next to think why shouldn't I be able to do it too ? or something, perhaps, a little like it. Since you were born, my dear old nurse and I have done everything for you, no one else has ever had charge of you. How is it, then, that in spite of all our care you have not yet learned to be a good girl ? Perhaps it is because you are still so ignorant. You do not know how to value the blessings God has given you. So I am going now to tell you the story of a life made up of self-sacrifice, devotion, and love. Listen, dear!"

Blanche was touched by this mark of her mother's confidence, and sat down with serious face to listen.

"Once upon a time, a mile from here, there lived a young woman, whose husband—he was a tiler—had been killed by falling from the roof of our house. The accident had been a great trouble to my father and mother ; and as they could do nothing, alas ! but help and comfort

the widow, they did it with the kindness which was so natural to them. The tiler's young widow was strong and healthy, true-hearted, and full of courage. She was left with one baby, and no other means of support but her needle. My parents began by giving her work to do at home, but seeing that she felt lonely and unhappy, because she was a stranger in the place and had no relations near, my mother determined to take her into the house as a workwoman, and give her regular wages besides board and lodging. God put that good thought into her heart, as the future has shown.

"My mother established the young widow in the little house yonder, and the move answered admirably. When I was born, my parents thought they could not do better than make her my nurse. In that capacity she was transferred to the Castle, and as her own baby died soon afterwards, she bestowed all her care and affection on me. My mother was never the least jealous of her, it was as though she had a presentiment that her poor child would

want two mothers—one for the present, and one for the future.

"I shall not dwell on the terrible trials which befel my parents when I was a child, nor on the dreadful circumstances of my father's death."

The tears coursed down Mrs. Tenassy's pale cheeks, as she paused for a moment to recover her composure; the eyes, too, which Blanche raised to her mother's face were wet.

"Mother," she said, tenderly, "don't skip the sad parts; please tell me all."

"No, dearest, I cannot; you would not understand. What would be the good of telling you of my mother's heartrending despair? I did not understand it then, not till the day came when God took your father away."

"What did you do when grandmother was so unhappy?"

"I? I played with my nurse, who had gone with us into our banishment, and devoted herself heart and soul to me. I slept beside her; she played with me, and sang to me, and I was the only happy one in the midst of all

the trouble. And yet she had plenty of reason to be sad : poor Nanny ! her little girl was dead, and all the anxieties arising from our destitute condition weighed with equal force on my mother and her. She shared all our griefs and sorrows, and God alone knows with what exquisite tact and delicacy she behaved under all circumstances.

“ We had nothing to live upon but what my mother had been able to bring away with her in her flight. Often and often I asked her to tell me about that terrible night when the alarm that the rebels were coming reached our home, and all was hurry and confusion. I could remember nothing about it myself, but I used to hear Nanny allude to it sometimes in speaking with our neighbour the washerwoman ; but my mother always put me off with saying that some day when I was older she would tell me my father’s history, and all that had happened to her since his sad death. Though I grew older, yet that day never came, for she sank into a deep melancholy, and all our efforts were devoted to trying to rouse and cheer her, not

sadden her, as speaking of the past always did. How lovingly and tenderly Nanny waited upon her ; what endless little devices she would resort to in the hopes of seeing a smile light up the sad pensive face, and a gleam of pleasure drive away, if only for a moment, the listless far-away look in those blue eyes which had shed so many tears ! Nanny was never weary in well-doing ; she did not faint ; and in time she earned her reward; for just before her dear mistress died the dark cloud passed away, and the faithful service was abundantly recognised. All the time we were in Italy, everything, in point of fact, rested on Nanny's shoulders—all the anxiety and all the responsibility ; and no one could have borne the burden more bravely than she, whilst having to think and act for her mistress ; and in her place she never forgot, and would never permit others to forget, that she was but a servant ; whilst having to give orders and exercise authority, she was always respectful and deferential in manner towards those whom she considered her superiors in rank and station."

"How could my grandmother pay Nanny's

wages if she was so poor, mother?" asked Blanche.

"She could not; Nanny never had any wages at all from the moment she left this place until she came back here, when your dear father and I were married. But that made no difference in her devotion; hers was in every sense a service of love, and often, alas! a very hard and painful service, owing to your poor grandmother's infirmities, which made her irritable and very difficult to please. Nanny knew she could not help it—that she was sick in mind as well as body, and therefore took everything with the most untiring patience."

"Were you already a big girl when grandmother died, mother?"

"I had just been confirmed, Blanche, and shall never cease to thank God for His mercy in restoring her to perfect consciousness before her death, so that she knew me and gave me her blessing when I came back from the church with Nanny; she knew that she was dying, and confided me to Nanny's care, saying, 'I give her to you; she is yours now, as long as

you live ; love her, and be as true a friend to her as you have been to me.'"

"What did Nanny say ?"

"She took me in her arms, kissed me, and called me her own child, and promised that nothing should ever make her leave me. Not long after that your grandmother died, and Nanny and I were left alone in the world, and for years she and I were all in all to each other ; she gave up everything for me, and had no other thought and care. I can never repay her for all she did ; many sacrifices she made which I knew nothing about at the time ; what one must have cost her I only fully understood on my wedding day, and that was her selling the gold cross and earrings her husband had given her the day they were married, in order to get something she fancied I could not do without. All the money we possess could not repay such a sacrifice as that, only the devotion of a lifetime. I owe everything to her, and if I had had to choose between remaining poor with her and becoming rich without her, I should have chosen the former. She brought me up to the

best of her power, taught me all she could, and gave me a taste for work; never allowing me, at the same time, to forget the station in which I was born. It was due to her that when we were in Italy I found friends who were my equals in rank, whose life I was allowed to share, and in whose society I found enjoyment and amusement suited to my age.

"Nanny, in spite of the strict simplicity she preserved under all circumstances, was honoured and looked up to as my mother herself would have been. Several times people advised her to lay aside her peasant's costume and her nurse's cap, and adopt the dress her position would perfectly have justified. 'No,' she said, 'every one must see at a glance that Miss Athenaïs is my mistress, and that I have had the honour of being her nurse.' And all she did was done so simply and quietly, without fuss or self-importance of any kind. Such goodness is not often met with, and is beyond all praise.

"Nanny spoiled her eyes with needlework in Italy. I helped her to the best of my ability,

but what could such a child as I then was do ? She never allowed herself any rest, excepting on Sundays. Thus she always found means to supply our wants, and contrived, besides, to set aside a considerable sum for ‘the journey home.’ That ‘journey home’ was the bright spot in the future towards which we were always looking. We talked of it, and planned it, and pictured every detail of it a hundred times over. Nanny had a large savings-box of carved wood—the box was cracked, so she had tied an old blue and yellow ribbon round it to hold it together.”

“What !” cried Blanche, eagerly ; “the one on your chest of drawers, that I wanted to burn because it was so ugly ?”

“Yes, that one. Now you know why I value it so. It used to stand on a little shelf—made, as it seemed, expressly for it—in the alcove where our bed stood. Each time Nanny received the money for her work she bought what was wanted for our housekeeping, and put the rest into the savings-box. This went on for years, until, almost without knowing it,

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we had collected what turned out to be quite a little fortune. When at last the time came for 'the journey home,' the box was broken, and the money we had saved proved to be sufficient to pay all our travelling expenses, and keep us for several months after our return to France. There was even enough to fit up my wardrobe and buy me a new dress, in which to present myself to those who had known my parents in the old days. Nanny was very particular about my appearance, and I've a distinct recollection of a certain pink and white frock she made for me, in which I was first introduced to the Tenassys, who were then in possession of my father's property. Our old friend, Count Melun, had from the first constituted himself my devoted guardian ; he and his family had come back to France with us, and it was he who introduced me to the Tenassys. I shall not stop to tell you the particulars of all that followed. With the aid of my two protectors, everything was satisfactorily arranged : the bird was brought back to its old nest, never again, I trust, to leave it. Nanny was truly

my guardian angel, and without her consent my marriage would never have taken place. She filled the place that would have been my mother's on my wedding-day, and has lived under this roof ever since, sharing our griefs and joys, but retaining, with her former independence, the position of a servant. Without her I hardly know how I should have borne the loss of all my treasures, one after the other. Her simple faith in God's goodness taught me to be resigned to His will. She spoke of you, and your need of a mother's love and care ; she said that you would become in time a joy and a help to both of us in our old age—that you would be sure to be a comfort to us then. I tried to believe her, and to devote myself entirely to your education ; I allowed no stranger to come between us, nor would I send you away to school, lest some harm should happen to you. Throughout, Nanny has been my helping hand. And you—have you valued all this care and tenderness ? have you tried to please us by being good, and obedient, and diligent ?"

Blanche looked up, with her eyes full of tears, silently asking to be forgiven ; and then, seizing both her mother's hands, covered them with kisses. Mrs. Tenassy bent down and kissed the earnest little face, whilst she repeated—

“ My darling, I will trust you.”





## CHAP. IX.—THE LITTLE SHOPKEEPER.

**M**ADELINE'S lamb had been sold for twenty-three shillings, quite a fortune in such a destitute household.

To begin with, a doctor was to be called in ; but early the next morning Dr. Dupont came down from the castle, by Mrs. Tenassy's orders, to see the sick woman. Bridget was surprised, but welcomed him gladly—for though she disliked asking for help, she received it with gratitude when it was offered. Shortly after the doctor left, Nanny came down with a covered basket containing all that he had prescribed for his patient, besides provisions of different kinds for the household. Blanche came too, and greeted Madeline so kindly, that Madeline felt drawn to her at once. She showed her her garden, her fowls, her rabbits,

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and answered all her questions without feeling the least shy or awkward.

Before a fortnight had passed the two girls were the best possible friends, and were full of all manner of delightful plans of what they meant to do.

" You know, Madeline," said Miss Tenassy, " I want to learn to be good—quite, quite good—and it's so difficult. Still it's easier now that I know you, and mother is beginning to be pleased with me, and to encourage me she has promised to try and make you happy. Do you understand?—the more I try to please her, the kinder she will be to you. And I mean to try so hard. I had two beautiful stories told me, and they have given me a great deal to think about.

" I think you're very good already, Miss Blanche—at least I know you are to me. I feel quite ashamed sometimes of all that you've done for me."

" Oh! you mustn't; for I like doing it, and it's not your fault if you're not rich like me."



**SHOWING THE PETS.**



"Are you rich already?" asked Madeline, playfully.

"Very," replied Blanche, in the same tone. Mother gives me ten shillings a-month if I do my lessons well, and I always shall now. And then I have got two hens, of my very own—one white, with a crest, and one speckled—and I may do what I like with all their eggs and little chickens. Then I've got a garden with beautiful flowers, and fruit-trees, and lots of vegetables, all belonging to me; mother gave it me a long while ago; but do you know, I never cared much about it till a few days ago."

"What do you mean?"

"Till I thought my garden might be of some use to me in helping you."

"How good of you to be always thinking about me like that!"

"I think of you very often. But listen; I've been talking with Nanny, who understands all about business, and I've told her all my plans."

"Have you got many? How funny! So have I, at least one. Only I can't tell anybody, and mother says it's impossible."

"It mightn't be, perhaps, Madeline, if you were to let me help. We'd manage it somehow. You've very little money, haven't you?"

"Just now we're rich, because of Loulou."

"Ah, Loulou! Loulou, whom you cried about so! Dear, I'm so angry with myself when I think about that; to think that if I hadn't been idle and naughty, I might have bought Loulou back for you; and you were so fond of him, weren't you?"

"Please don't talk about him, miss; I can't help crying, and yet I said I wouldn't, because I sold him for mother's sake."

"All the same, it's very sad; he looked so pretty and white, and was so gentle when I met him on the road!"

"Never mind; it couldn't be helped, you know; he had to be killed. I oughtn't to have loved him so; but it was his fault, not mine, he was so nice! But I'm not going to think about him any more, because of mother."

"Poor Madeline! Come now, we'll talk about our plans. First, you tell me yours."

"Oh, my plan's all nonsense! It's only that if I had some money of my own, I should have a little shop—here at home, I mean; our two windows would be the shop windows. I should sell——"

"What fun! Calico, print, caps, collars, and all those kind of things, you mean, don't you?"

"No, I didn't mean such things as that, miss; because I haven't got them. I was thinking of our hens' eggs, and lettuce, and cabbages, and carrots, out of our garden; and in the autumn apples and pears, and a beautiful rabbit sometimes."

"What a good idea!—a greengrocer's shop, and a linen-draper's, too!—one window for each! You'd sell all you had of your own, and I should buy all sorts of things for you with the money that I get for being good at lessons. And then in my play-time I'd make kettle-holders, napkin-rings, and book-markers for you to sell; that will be fun! We'll begin already, next week, or to-morrow, perhaps."

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The two girls ran on in this way until Nanny called Blanche, and told her it was time to go home. The few words she had overheard made her hope that intercourse with Madeline would be the means of rescuing Blanche from her selfishness and indolence, by giving her an object to work for other than her own gratification ; and she retraced her steps with a light heart.

At the Castle, things at once began to wear a brighter aspect. The lessons were resumed, and all went smoothly. There were no cross looks, no impatient kicks under the table, no rude answers. Instead of spending as much time as she possibly could—washing her slate, pointing her pencil, ruling her lines, and finding all kinds of excuses for going out of the room or looking out of the window—Blanche had everything ready when her mother came into the schoolroom, and set to work directly, without having to be told at least five or six times to “sit down and begin.” It really looked too as if her lessons were a pleasure to her, and the fact was, she found that the more attentive

she was, the less tiresome they seemed to become, and the less impatiently she waited for the clock to strike twelve.

In Bridget's cottage things looked brighter too. In the first place, Bridget herself was better, and grew stronger every day—thanks to the doctor's medicine, and still more to the good dinners which daily found their way to her from the Castle kitchen. And secondly, the proposed plan of a shop was actually beginning to be carried into execution. Yielding to Blanche's urgent entreaties, Mrs. Tenassy had advanced her part of her allowance, and, besides, made her a present of five pounds wherewith to stock the little shop; she also told Blanche that she might, if she liked, give Madeline all the produce of her own garden to sell. This was a brilliant suggestion. Blanche had completely neglected her garden for a long while; now it acquired a new value in her eyes. She might be seen having wise, earnest talks with the gardener about what kind of things grew best in her soil, what kind of vegetables would fetch the best prices, and be, taking all

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into consideration, the most profitable investment. Before breakfast, and the moment her lessons were over, out she ran to plant and weed and water. It was an unusually dry season, so Blanche's watering-pot was in constant request, and many were the journeys to and from the pump in the kitchen-yard to her garden. The sight of her hot, eager face, as she came staggering down the broad garden walk with her heavy load, spilling the water over her feet as she half-walked half-ran, often made the old gardener smile and wonder "how long it would last." He knew well enough how her arm must ache and her hands burn, and, moreover, it was quite new to see missy so busy and eager about anything. Meanwhile her carrots and potatoes were growing famously, her lettuces looked as crisp as any in "the big garden;" and missy's zeal did not abate.

The loading of the first wheelbarrowful of fruit and vegetables of her own growing was a great event, and Blanche wore an air of vast importance, as with beaming face she trudged down to the cottage with a basket of straw-

berries in her hand by the side of Tom, the gardener's lad, who had been asked to wheel the barrow for her. Nanny, of course, was of the party, and took her share of the work by carrying two huge cabbages, beneath which she was almost buried.

Madeline's brothers, who were sitting on the doorstep, greeted the arrival of this procession with clapping of hands, and loud calls to Maddy to "come and see." In walked the strawberries, followed by the cabbages, whilst Tom and the barrow waited outside for orders. The reception answered Blanche's highest expectations; and how often, when she was digging and weeding and raking, she had said to herself, "I wonder what Madeline will say." Nanny and Bridget were soon chatting to their hearts' content in the back room, for the girls were far too excited to take any heed of them. Nanny had to tell Bridget how hard Blanche had worked; how diligently she had watered her vegetables, and weeded her strawberries; how good and docile she was, and what a comfort to her mother. Dear old

Nanny, how delighted she was to be able to praise Blanche with a good conscience! May she not be forgiven if she was rather long-winded in her praise? In that respect nurses and mothers are privileged persons.

Meanwhile the barrow was unloading, and its contents were being set out to the best advantage in the right-hand window. And if any one thinks that it was of no consequence how the things were arranged, or that their arrangement was an easy task, to be accomplished in a few minutes, he is greatly mistaken. "This cabbage looks beautiful so, but the window won't open now!" "The strawberries *must* be here; but no, they won't like being so near the onions." "See, Madeline, how lovely the lettuces look, with the mustard and cress round them; now don't they?" Such were the remarks which reached the ears of the two women from time to time, and made them smile in the midst of their talk. Tom was a great help, he had such "good ideas." Besides, he was so obliging; he never seemed tired of moving the things; he fetched in stones from

the road, and propped up the cabbages from behind, so that they leaned forward and showed their beautiful yellow hearts to those who stood outside. They would never have thought of that. The children declared Tom was "so clever." Little Jack had to be scolded for taking a bite out of a new potato; he might have chosen something nicer, to be sure; for all that, it would never do if shopkeepers were to begin by eating their own goods. He cried a little, but soon dried his eyes and forgot all about it.

The eggs which Madeline's hens had laid, and the leeks and endive from her garden, made a great show in the window. Besides one dead rabbit, marked "For sale," which hung by the door, a real live white bunny in his cage, marked "Not to be sold," was exhibited at the back of the window. "People," they said, "will perhaps stop to look at him munching his lettuce, and then be tempted to buy something."

Their worthy remarks were truly amusing to hear. They talked like old people of the price

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of things, and discoursed wisely on the probable waste and loss they must be prepared to meet.

The contents of the other window were of a different nature altogether, and not so perishable. Mrs. Tenassy had contributed several pieces of coloured print suitable for everyday wear, some blue checked linen for aprons, and calico sheeting. Blanche had brought tapes, cotton binding, pins, needles, and thread—a small store of each “just to begin with,” she told Madeline.

Madeline was already known as “the little shopkeeper” in the village. She and Blanche were to have all the responsibility and merit of the undertaking; the elders were merely to encourage, and, if need be, help a little, as elders always are expected to do, when difficulties arose.

When everything was finally arranged in both windows, there was great rejoicing amongst the children; they could not sufficiently admire their handiwork, and went out first into the garden, then on to the road,

turning their heads from one side to the other to judge of the general effect, and calculate the impression likely to be produced on others. Blanche was as happy as Madeline whilst all this was going on, and remembered again and again her mother's words—"If you are good, I will allow you to make her happy."

She felt how much depended on her now, how serious a responsibility she had taken on herself. That she should fail seemed impossible, her resolutions were so strong ; she fancied she never could be naughty again.

It was growing towards evening, and Nanny and Blanche were just starting to go home, when the arrival of Francis, the old gardener, occasioned another pleasant surprise at the cottage. Mrs. Tenassy had sent him down with a splendid melon, which was to shed a particular glory over the shop on the opening day. Francis was much amused at the general excitement caused by his entrance. He was asked what he thought of it all ; "didn't it look nice ? hadn't they arranged it beautifully?" and so forth, were the questions that assailed him

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on all sides. The next thing was, where was the melon to go? Francis was to say ; he knew best, of course. So Francis decided that the melon was to have the highest place, above the strawberries, and between the two great cabbages with the yellow hearts. Thus it formed the crowning piece of the whole erection, and presented a most imposing appearance. With wise forethought, however, Francis advised that it should be dethroned for the night and laid in a cool place, a precaution which was adopted with regard to the other things as well. Whereupon they all separated, and Blanche went home to dream that she was behind the counter, driving a brisk trade, and amusing herself immensely.





## CHAP. X.—MADELINE'S FIRST DAY OF SHOPKEEPING.

**G**REAT was the excitement among the old women of St. Foy when Madeline opened her shop next morning. They all wanted to buy something ; and, not caring to pay more than two or three pence for the gratification of their idle curiosity, parsley and onions were in great request.

Dame Nixon came up just as Madeline had set out her goods. It had been no easy task, and took her a long time to make her shop front look as nice as it did the preceding day. However, she succeeded at last, and just as she was putting the finishing touches she heard the old dame's voice at the gate calling out—

“ Well, Madeline ; and so you've set up in business ?”

“Yes, dame, and I hope to do some with you. You must buy something of me; it'll bring me good luck. Tell me, what will you have?”

“What's the price of the melon yonder?”

“Half-a-crown; and I'm not overcharging you. It's cheap at the price; such a beauty as it is. It came from the Castle garden.”

“You don't imagine I thought it came up in your garden, do you, instead of a carrot? And what do you want for the strawberries?”

“I can give you some for threepence or some for twopence, whichever you like.”

“I like raspberries better.”

“Dear, and I haven't got any! There are no raspberry bushes in Miss Blanche's garden, and everything I have comes from there.”

“It won't last long, so you'd better make up your mind to it beforehand. Bless you, I know them, these rich folk. It's something new just at first, but they'll be tired of it before you know where you are. They've got all they want, and snap their fingers at the poor.”



**MADELINE'S SHOP.**



"I beg your pardon, Dame Nixon; there are some rich people who think of nothing but doing good, like these ladies. Won't you have some turnips?"

"How do you sell them?"

"This lot for threepence."

"I don't like turnips."

"I've some lovely onions."

"Show us."

"Here, see—these, I mean."

"Well, and what good would they be to me, eh?"

"They're capital in a stew. Potatoes? Yes, I've got some beauties; buy a bushel. Beauties they are; now have some, do!"

"Pah! potatoes, they make me choke."

"Oh, how unlucky I am, to be sure; why, I thought they'd just suit you. Have one of my lettuces then, will you?"

"I've got a whole basket full. A penn'orth of parsley, you might give me, now I come to think of it; that I do want."

"With all my heart, Dame Nixon."

"Ah! she's in a good temper, the young

lady at the Castle, is she? Well, that is a miracle. She's as naughty as naughty can be, it seems."

"Oh! if people say that, you shouldn't repeat it; it is very wrong. A young lady whose reward for being good is that she's allowed to be kind to me!"

"I wouldn't trust her. She's as proud of her money as a peacock of his tail."

"Proud! Oh, how can you? She talks and laughs and plays with me as if there were no difference between us. She brings mother beef-tea with her own hands—such good beef-tea, that it's made mother ever so much stronger already."

"That may be. I don't like rich folk, that's all I've got to say. Look here, child; you may just as well not give me that parsley, I don't care much about it."

"Very well; another time, Dame Nixon, when you happen to be in want of anything, you'll know where to come. I shall be delighted to serve you."

And thus, empty-handed, the old gossip

turned on her heel, and went her way down the street, stopping first at one door then at the other for a chat. If every one else had been such a poor customer as she, Madeline would have soon been dispirited ; but some real buyers did make their appearance in the course of the day, and though they did not spend much on their purchases, they made the prospect of getting on in time look more hopeful. Towards six o'clock in the evening, Mrs. Tenassy sent down to ask Madeline if she could let her have a fine melon for dessert, as some guests had unexpectedly arrived to dinner, and Francis hadn't one ready to cut in the frames.

"Here, this one belongs to Mrs. Tenassy, take it," said Madeline, eagerly, to the servant who had brought the message ; "I'm only too thankful to have had it here all to-day to attract customers."

"No, Miss Madeline, my orders were to give you three shillings for it ; Mrs. Tenassy said so."

Madeline dared not object ; she sent her

duty to Mrs. Tenassy, and the melon was carried off.

At night Madeline, with her mother's help, set to work to reckon up her gains. She made several mistakes at first, but by dint of patience she found that she had taken seven shillings and fivepence. This was splendid, and most encouraging. She danced for joy. Like Perrette, she counted up all that she expected to earn the next day, and the next, and the next; and saw herself, in imagination, becoming possessed of untold sums. Then she thought of all the things she would buy—everything that they wanted in the cottage—everything that her mother fancied. She saw her mother completely restored to health; her brothers going every day to school, dressed in complete suits of new clothes, carrying their dinner with them; she saw a goat of her own, tethered by the roadside, which it was her business to milk night and morning. Perrette's story over again, word for word. Alas! and do you remember what befel Perrette's jug of milk? We shall see.

One thought alone gave Madeline a pang in the midst of her happiness. "No matter how rich I am, I cannot bring my dear little Loulou back. He is sold—killed—eaten! I can never see him again! Oh, if my shop had only been opened a few weeks sooner! But there, it's too bad of me; I said I would not think about it, and yet I do. How foolish to care so much about him; but he really was so pretty! Well, what's done is done. Mother is better, and that's the chief thing."

With which reflection she got into bed. The rest of the family were already asleep. Since her mother's illness, it had been her business to hear the little boys say their prayers, and put them to bed—to clear away the supper things and make all straight—to lock the door and put out the light.

The moon was shining in at the window full on Madeline's bed that night. The soft murmur of the brook outside was the only sound that broke the stillness. Madeline's thoughts, as she laid her head on the pillow, wandered away from her shop and her earnings to more

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serious things. She thought of her approaching confirmation—of the solemn promises she would soon have to make—of her own weakness and God's love, and her thoughts became an earnest prayer to her Father in heaven that He would bless her and keep her in all her ways. Long after she had fallen asleep, the moon was still shining in the little room, as though loath to leave that calm, sweet face.





## CHAP. XI.—TRANSIENT REFORMATION.

THE would be difficult to over-estimate the first strength and ardour of Blanche's resolutions. She jumped out of bed in the morning the minute she was called in beaming good-humour, dressed without dawdling, allowed no wandering thoughts to disturb her prayers, held up a bright face to her mother to be kissed, and sat down to her lessons with steadfast determination. In the course of one month she had made so much progress that her mother could not praise her enough.

Nanny was no less delighted at the change, and was repeatedly heard to say that Blanche reminded her more and more of Athenaïs, which was the highest praise she could bestow. She used every means in her power to further the improvement, entering into all Blanche's views

with regard to Madeline, and suggesting new ways of helping her. For instance, one of Blanche's hens showed an inclination to sit. Nanny immediately provided a comfortable nest in a quiet corner of the orchard, and a sitting of thirteen of the finest eggs the poultry-yard could furnish. Blanche was in raptures. She promised to take such care of the hen and chickens—feed them herself every day—and, when they were big and plump, give them to Madeline to sell. It was a first-rate idea; ten or twelve fat chickens, ready for roasting, would make a fine show in Madeline's window. But corn would be wanted to feed them with, and as Mrs. Tenassy wished to teach her daughter that in order to be able to do good to others she must deny herself first, she told her that the corn must be bought with her own money. Blanche was quite willing. "Of course, I never expected you to pay for my chickens' food, mother; that's my concern," she said, emphatically.

How easy it is to begin well; everything seems to go smoothly at first; and Blanche

found a charm in the novelty of trying to be diligent and attentive at her lessons. How long would the novelty last? Long enough for the exception to become the rule? long enough for good habits to drive out the old bad ones? We shall see.

During five or six weeks Blanche scarcely felt any inclination even to be idle. There she sat writing, reading, and learning with studious earnestness, hardly daring to breathe for fear of wasting her time.

But later on, temptations came. She resisted valiantly at first. Murette, the white cat—a great favourite—really was most trying. She would come stealing into the schoolroom, jump up behind Blanche, rub herself against her elbow whilst she was writing, purr and tickle Blanche's cheek with the tip of her tail, do all she could to attract attention, and be very much incensed at being suddenly seized and put out of the room with the exclamation, “Really, pussy, you're too troublesome!”

Blanche was certainly doing her best to conquer her bad habits, but she was too confi-

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dent of success, and too vain of the progress she made. She laughed at her former faults, and scorned the idea of ever being guilty of them again. Her mother looked on in silence ; she knew how often her little girl's resolutions would be broken—how many temptations would arise, too strong for her to resist—how much she had yet to learn.

Who has not felt how difficult it is at times to be attentive ? I, for one, have often. You want to prepare your lesson for to-morrow. You know that you've only an hour to do it in. You perch on your stool, tuck up your feet on the bar, settle yourself as comfortably as you can, and open your *History of France*. You have come to the reign of Louis XIV., and have got to learn all about Turenne's victories in Artois over the Spaniards. You come to the battle of Arras, and are trying to remember how many Spaniards and French lay dead on the ground when it was over, because Miss Wilson is sure to ask you—that's just the kind of thing she always wants to know ; why, you really can't think—when, hark ! that's a strange

dog barking in the courtyard. You must just take a look at him—see what he's like, and whether Grip is going to fight him. You return to your seat, and having learnt the important facts that the strange dog came in with the miller's cart, and that Grip is far too busy with his sheep to take any notice of him, you go back to the battle of Arras. “Turenne mounted on his white charger——” “Take your elbows off the table,” calls out Miss Brown, in that piercing voice of hers which goes through and through you, that sets you off wondering why it is considered such an unpardonable sin to put your elbows on the table, and determining to do it whenever you like—even at dinner, when you're grown up—and again the numbers of the dead are forgotten. Or you are reading about Provence, and the song of the troubadour that “moved through a perpetual May-time, the grass was ever green, the music of the lark and the nightingale rang out from field and thicket;” and the lark makes you think of the nest “the boys” found in the field the other day; and now the grass is being cr

and you're sure the mowers won't see it, and will cut right into it with their scythes and kill all the young ones ; and then you wish it were twelve o'clock, so that you could get out into the hay-field, and help the men to toss out the grass.

All this time, with the exception of one trip to the window, you never once raised your eyes from the closely-printed page ; but were you attending to your lessons ?

With Blanche, as with many others, it was not good-will that was wanting, but the power of keeping her attention fixed. Then when the time came for saying her lessons to her mother, and she did not remember "the numbers of the knights and footmen," she was angry with herself and out of temper with everybody else ; little by little, alas ! she was slipping back into the old bad ways. And Madeline ? alas for Madeline !

Not that she was forgotten ; far from it. Blanche cared for nothing unless Madeline could share it with her. She had a pair of monies and a little basket carriage, which she

was allowed to drive herself, provided she did not go beyond the park ; and it was still her greatest pleasure to take Madeline for a turn, whilst the villagers were at their dinner, and no customers likely, therefore, to present themselves.

But in one way Madeline was sometimes forgotten. Bad marks at lessons meant less pocket-money at the week's end, so that Blanche's idleness and inattention always told on the prosperity of the little shop, and some days its windows were but poorly stocked.





## CHAP. XII.—A MONTH'S ABSENCE.

THE summer had come, and everybody in town and country was on the wing. Mrs. Tenassy cared little either for society or change of air. She had all she wanted at St. Foy—air and shade and retirement; for certain family reasons, however, she was obliged this year to accept the often-repeated invitation of an aunt of hers, who had a beautiful estate in the neighbourhood of Bordeaux, and Blanche was, of course, not to be left behind.

Blanche was naturally delighted at the prospect of the journey, and of making the acquaintance of her two cousins, girls of about her own age.

She began, more than a fortnight before the time, to prepare for the visit, and it seemed to her as if the day fixed for their departure would never come. But at last the wished-for

morning did dawn, and she arose with the sun, to run up and down stairs in wild excitement, giving all kinds of parting injunctions to the servants about her cat, her fowls, and her garden, and last, not least, to Nanny about all she was to do for Madeline. Nanny promised to do her best, and then began to cry. "The place would seem so empty when they were gone," she said, in a faltering voice; "and she should feel so lonely."

At last they were seated in the carriage, the luggage was tied on behind, the postilion cracked his whip, and off they drove down the avenue and out at the big iron gates. Nanny stood at the door till the sound of the horses' bells had died away, then slowly mounted the stairs to her room, and sat down in her big arm-chair as if to wait for their return. It seemed as if there were nothing else to do but wait for them. They were all she had in the world, and were gone away for a whole month. And then she was worried by the thought of the bad influence Blanche's cousins might have upon her. She knew that they

were spoiled, idle, and vain, and that Blanche was impressionable, capricious, and easily led. She feared the consequences, and was naturally inclined that day to take a desponding view of everything; so she fetched her knitting, and the click of the busy needles soon produced its accustomed soothing effect on her mind.

Meanwhile, Blanche and her mother were being rapidly whirled farther and farther away from home and Nanny. As they drove through the village, Blanche had caught sight of Madeleine and her brothers, and one of her school friends, in the field at the back of the cottage. Jack had a hammer in his hand, but she could not make out what they were all doing. She leaned out of the window, and waved her handkerchief in the hopes of attracting their attention, but they did not see her, and were soon left behind.

It was nine o'clock in the evening before the travellers reached their destination, and drove into Mrs. St. Clair's courtyard. The whole family was standing on the steps to receive them. Two young girls came up to Blanche

holding out their hands ; kisses were next exchanged, then a few words, and so acquaintance was made. Girls of their age do not take long to become fast friends. They are disposed to laugh at the least trifle, and laughing together soon puts even grown-up people at their ease. From the first moment, Blanche was sure she should enjoy herself very much at Mrs. St. Clair's.

Alice and Eulalie were twins, and little more than fifteen years old. To judge from their dress and appearance they might have been grown-up young ladies, but to hear them talk you would have said they were not more than ten. Their studies had never been looked upon as anything but a pastime, nor had they ever been trained to apply their minds to serious subjects ; the consequence was they were ludicrously ignorant. They took no pleasure in listening to the conversation of their elders, unless it were of a nature to make them laugh. By nature they were not at all stupid, and had a keen sense of the ridiculous, which led them to be very malicious at times. They had

been praised for their sharp, sprightly sayings, and were thoroughly satisfied with themselves. To have a good figure and a pretty face, to be rich and well dressed, was the height of their ambition. Possessed of these advantages, they thought no one could fail to like them.

Mrs. Tenassy had not been twenty-four hours in the house before she was trying to invent some pretext for shortening their intended stay, so unfavourably was she impressed by the girls' manners, and so uneasy as to the influence they might exercise on Blanche.

Blanche, on her part, felt exceedingly happy. Alice and her sister were ready to laugh at everything, and they were soon on the most intimate terms. They asked her innumerable questions about what she did at home, and greeted her description of her life at St. Foy with shouts of laughter. "What, you get up at six in summer! My poor girl, you're treated like a little child, and you in your fourteenth year! We never go to bed till ten, sometimes not till eleven, and get up as late as we can possibly manage."

"How do you mean?" asked Blanche, with surprise; "are you not called?"

"We're called, yes, unfortunately; but there are so many excuses you can invent: you haven't closed your eyes all night, you've got a headache or toothache. Mamma and grand-mamma think it happens rather often, but you don't mind what they say."

"Then you don't begin lessons till very late, I suppose?"

"Too soon always for our taste," said Eulalie; "they are such a bore. Our governess leaves us no peace with her history lessons, and her geography lessons, and her arithmetic lessons. There's no end to them, and the grammar lessons are worse than all! What good can it possibly do you, I ask, to know that 'and' is a preposition, or 'dreadful' an adverb—that 'if' governs the imperative, and that the infinitive of the verb 'to be' is 'being.' It all gets jumbled up together in my head, so that I've given up trying to understand; and I can always put our governess into a good humour again by the rate at which I learn my

lessons by heart. She gives me a long piece of poetry, and says, ‘Learn that for me by this afternoon.’ I take the book, sit down at the table with my fingers in my ears so as not to hear what Alice is doing, and in half-an-hour I can say it off without a single mistake. Mamma says I’ve got a wonderful memory. Miss Duval sometimes asks me to tell her, in my own words, what the poetry is about ; then I say that my words wouldn’t be half as good as the poet’s, and begin to repeat it all over again. Miss Duval puts on her grave face, and begins to scold me for being what she calls ‘impertinent.’ Mamma calls it ‘witty,’ for I heard her telling grandmamma about it the other day, and they both laughed.”

“ You don’t like Miss Duval, then ?”

“ How should I ? She does nothing but bother from morning till night ; and then she’s so desperately tidy and punctual, and makes such a fuss if we don’t put away our things directly we’ve done with them, and if we’re late for meals ; then she wears such ugly dresses, and her bonnets are so unfashionable,

we're quite ashamed when we have to go to church with her. I'm thankful to think we're to be confirmed next year, for then we shall have done with governesses and lessons, and all that sort of thing, and shall be able to do just as we like."

"You must pity me very much then, I should think, as I've no sister to laugh and have fun with?"

"Indeed I do. I wouldn't be you for anything—living in the country all the year round with old people, and obliged always to do what they tell you, as you say you are; it would kill me, I declare!"

"But why?" asked Blanche.

"You ask why?" said Alice, laughing. But in the winter, what on earth do you do? Not a creature to see!"

"Mother and nurse are always there."

"Well, I call that nobody."

"Do you? But they're always so kind to me."

"That may be. But when it rains, you don't know how to amuse yourself, I'm sure."

"Oh yes, I do; I've got my books and games; and then my cat, I often play with her."

"At your age?" said Alice, with a contemptuous smile.

"Yes; and why not? Mother says she's very glad I do; that it's good for me after my lessons, as it rests me."

"Well, it may be good for you, that I can't say; but it's not the kind of thing we care about. We like grown-up pleasures. In the winter, when we're in Paris, mamma gives lots of parties, and we're always allowed to be in the drawing-room; it's so amusing seeing all the dresses, and listening to what the people say. You never see anything finer than the ribbon in your nurse's cap, I suppose; do you? Is it blue or yellow or rust colour, eh?"

At this the two sisters burst out laughing. Blanche laughed, but was really, in the depth of her heart, hurt by her cousins' contemptuous words. Their remarks on their governess seemed to be so many reflections on Mrs. Tenassy, who was her governess as well as her mother; and the ridicule poured on her beloved

Nanny, Blanche regarded as an unpardonable fault—a fault which, spite of all her thoughtlessness, she would never have been guilty of. Like all persons of weak and rather shallow character, she hovered irresolute, between surprise at the sneers of her cousins on the one hand, and the pleasure she found in the freedom from all restraint in their company. When she was with them she could not withstand their influence, and longed to acquire the same ease of manner, and imitate their gay rattle; but whenever she was alone, or with her mother, her own better nature and good desires regained the mastery.

The days slipped by, and the visit was rapidly drawing to a close. Life was one ceaseless round of dissipation and amusement; picnics, garden parties, and evening dances followed each other in quick succession. Blanche was wild with excitement, and sometimes felt almost tempted to shun the sweet, calm face of her mother, reminding her, as it did, of a more serious and useful life. Her heart was unchanged, but there never seemed

to be any time to think, and her high spirits grew quite uncontrollable. And Nanny? Did Blanche ever think of her? She had no time. And Madeline? No time!

It did, however, occasionally happen, that when she was quiet in bed she would think over the two stories her nurse and her mother had told her, and recall the moment when Nanny first opened the lid of her treasure-box and showed her its contents. She felt sure that the impressions then made could not have been effaced, since her being quiet and alone was sufficient to bring them back; she remembered the promises she had made, and determined afresh to keep them, in the midst of which thoughts she would fall asleep. When morning came, the ceaseless chatter of her giddy cousins, and the eager discussion of plans for the day, drove all the serious thoughts away, and all the good resolutions were forgotten.

Amusement is all very well within certain bounds, and Mrs. Tenassy would have been delighted to see Blanche gay and light-hearted in the company of girls of her own age, if only

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they had not been girls like Alice and Eulalie St. Clair. They were repugnant to her in almost every respect. Their want of reverence for persons older than themselves, their freedom of language, their idle, selfish habits and free-and-easy manners, affected her most disagreeably; and over and over again she regretted having brought Blanche in contact with them. They were always on the watch for anything ridiculous in the speech, manners, or dress of others, old or young, rich or poor. When visitors came to see their grandmother or mamma, they would sit in a corner of the room, and whisper and giggle and criticise every word that was said; but when there were no visitors, their object seemed to be to avoid the society of their elders as much as possible. We know the light in which they regarded their lessons, and that cultivation of mind had no value in their eyes when compared to fashionable and expensive clothes. Alas, poor girls! they deserved to be pitied, not only for their many defects, but still more for their ignorance of those defects.



### CHAP. XIII.—FIRE!

**B**UM, bum, bum, bum ! cries the bell. Fire, fire ! It is midnight, the whole village is sleeping. Bum, bum, bum ! cries the bell, determined to be heard. The soundest sleepers wake at last. In every cottage a woman is the first to open the window and look out. Where is the fire ? the first question she asks. The column of smoke and the flying sparks return a speedy answer ; they rise from Bridget's cottage—her poor straw-thatched cottage, which, small as it is, contains all that the widow and her three children have in the world.

An alarm of fire rouses the most passive and indifferent. Nobody can resist the call to help. Some for one reason, some for another, all in the twinkling of an eye fly to the spot ;

generally the most inquisitive are the first to reach it. So, in this instance, Dame Nixon was the first on the scene. Before her neighbours were awake, she had donned an old blue and red striped petticoat and a print jacket, and was making her way down the street, guided by the smoke and the ruddy light. When she saw the general desolation, burning thatch, and the broken windows, she began, true to her character, calling out at the top of her voice—"Who set fire to the place? tell me, who? Was it you, Madeleine? was it you, Jack? There's a pretty business! However did it happen? Tell me, some of you; can't you?"

"I didn't do it on purpose," sobbed poor Jack, for he was the culprit. He had let a spark from the snuff of a lighted candle he was carrying in his hand fall on a bundle of straw in the bakehouse; the straw was damp, and had not burst into flame till long after they had all been in bed and asleep.

"Ah! it was you, you miserable good-for-nothing fellow, you! Ah! you'll catch it,

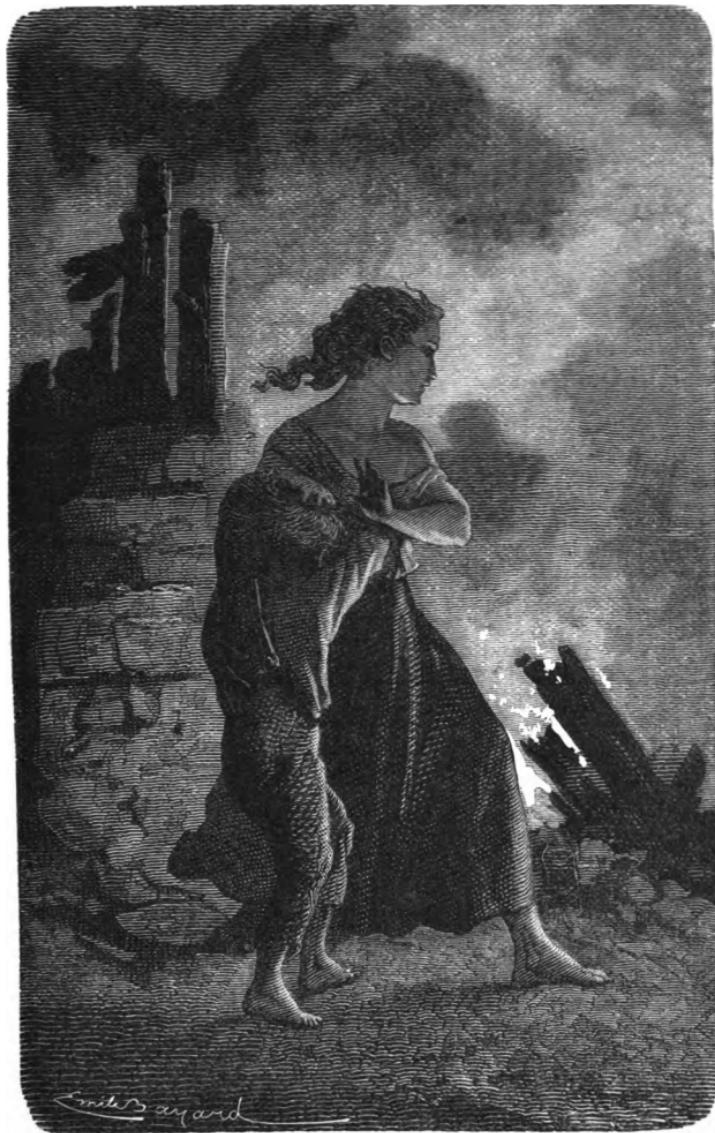
won't you ; wait till the watchman comes, he's not likely to let you off."

"I promise I'll never do it again," said the trembling, terrified child. His sister Madaline, seeing the state he was in, contrived, as she passed, to whisper, so that Dame Nixon should not overhear her—

"Never mind, Jacky, nobody will beat you ; you're enough punished already by what has happened to us all."

His sister's words comforted him directly ; he always believed everything she said ; Madeline had never deceived him. So he ran off and fetched his little watering-pot out of the shed behind the cottage, filled it at the pump, and began gravely watering a piece of an empty cask that was smouldering in the garden, doing no harm to any one. The fire was his fault, and he wanted to help to put it out.

People soon came running up from all sides—men, women, and children. The whole village was agog ; a fire was not an everyday thing, and must be seen. There was a well about thirty yards from the cottage, and the active



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bystanders, those who were not stupefied by sleep or by the novelty of the sight formed themselves into a chain, reaching from the cottage to the well, and passed the buckets backwards and forwards. They were not very skilful at the work, and more than half the water was spilt on the way.

“Look out, dame ; you’re dashing the water all over my feet !”

“Good gracious ! it’s all I can do to lift it. Have a care, you’ll let the bucket go.”

“Down it goes ! It wasn’t my fault. You let go too soon.”

The comments that passed between them, and the laughing and joking that went on, were far more abundant than the water. The French manage to laugh at everything ; they cannot be serious for fear of being bored ; yet their self-devotion is equal to that of any other people.

Whilst all were doing their best to help—some in one way, some in another—Nanny was to be seen making her way to the spot. Her heart travelled faster than her feet, and was at

the cottage long before her body was. She was so sorry for Bridget: she always felt for the misfortunes of others, but Bridget's misfortune came particularly home to her just now, because Mrs. Tenassy had taken her under her special charge, and Blanche was so fond of Madeline. She had not known her long, to be sure, but was very much attached to her, nevertheless. In Nanny's mind, Madeline had become inseparably connected with Blanche and Mrs. Tenassy; and so, as she hobbled slowly down to the flaming cottage, she said over and over again to herself, "How sorry they will be when they hear of it."

On reaching the spot, as she knew she could be of no use in putting out the fire—she could not lift even half-a-bucketful of water—she went straight to Bridget, who, folks told her, was sitting on the bed that had been carried out with the rest of the furniture into the neighbouring field. Nanny found her in the greatest distress at being forced to sit quiet and look on; for though she knew she was too weak to be anything but a hindrance to the

other workers, her active spirit made sitting still a sore trial to her. Nanny's presence was just what she wanted ; it had been a comfort to her many and many a time since she first fell sick ; and as Nanny sat down beside her, and began to talk about "being glad it's no worse," and what a good thing it was the children were none of them hurt, and that the furniture had all been saved—that it hadn't happened a few weeks ago, when "you were so weak you couldn't lift your head from the pillow," she felt less utterly wretched.

"Why, Bridget, even if the worst comes to the worst, and the walls are burnt to the ground, they can be built up again. As for the roof, a thatched roof isn't worth much in these days ; nobody thinks of having anything but tiles or slates to cover their houses with now ; a tiled roof is better in every way than a roof such as yours was."

"Alas!" replied the widow, in a piteous voice ; "if God doesn't build up my home again, it's all over with me!"

"Well, believe that He will, then ; put

your trust in Him, and keep up heart and hope!"

"I'll try," was the faint and rather despondent answer.

"Now tell me, what have you done with Andrew? Where have you left him? I want to take him home with me and put him to bed out of the way. Where is he?"

"There, in his cot, asleep; Madeline and I carried him out the first thing, and he never woke."

Nanny looked, and there he was, sure enough, curled up in his little bed, which stood between the wheelbarrow and the fence, sound asleep. She stroked his cheek, drew back the blanket that covered him, and told him to get up. Andrew opened his eyes and looked round, very much bewildered. He could not make out where he was; he sat up and rubbed his eyes, and, catching sight of his mother, called out, "Mother, where am I?"

Bridget went to him, and by degrees made him understand what had happened, quieted his fears when he caught sight of the smoke

and flames, and persuaded him to allow Nanny, when she had put on his shoes and rolled her own shawl round him, to lead him away across the field by the nearest way to the Castle. All her efforts to induce Jack to go too were vain. He had been told to stand at the pump, ready to fill all the buckets that were brought to him, and, like a brave little soldier, would not desert his post. He was so glad to have something definite given him to do, for the terrible thought that it was all his fault still weighed heavily on him, in spite of what Madeline had said to comfort him. His answer both to Nanny and his mother, who each in turn asked him to go to the Castle with Andrew, was: "The fire is my fault, and of course I must help to put it out." He clutched the pump-handle as he spoke, and, before the last word was out of his mouth, was working it vigorously up and down again, as if his very life depended on its being kept perpetually in motion.

"Let him be, then," said his mother, turning to Nanny. "Let him stay, as his mind seems

so bent on it; it's perhaps better he should, it'll make him more careful in future."

"Was it you, Jack, then, who set fire to the cottage?" enquired Nanny, without any harshness in her tone. "You must mind and be more careful another time, my boy; I am **sure** you will; **wont** you?"

Saying this, she patted him kindly on the shoulder. And seeing Madeline busy collecting the kitchen utensils, which had not been injured by the fire, and such of the crockery as had escaped whole, and packing them into the wheelbarrow, she called out to her—"Cheer up, Madeline; there's a brave girl. Never fear, things are seldom as bad as they seem. We shall meet again in the morning."

"Thank you, Mrs. Nanny. It's just our old bad luck; we can never get over this—that I can see."

"Where there's a will there's a way"—there's a cure for everything, so never despair."

With these encouraging words Nanny turned to go, and with Andrew toddling along beside her—holding fast by her gown—made her

way home, and up into her room again. She put a pillow across the foot of her bed for Andrew to lie upon, covered him up with a shawl, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing him fast asleep. It was not easy for her, after the unwonted disturbance and excitement she had undergone, to compose herself to sleep. The thought of poor Bridget's misery, of the flaming ruin, and, more than all, what Blanche would say, kept her awake a long while.

Notwithstanding the energy and activity of the neighbours, it turned out when the fire was extinguished that very little had been saved. The stock of linen-drapery was all but wholly destroyed; the few things that had been rescued were spoiled by the smoke, and would fetch next to nothing; needless to say, the fruit and vegetables, the eggs, &c., were all burnt or washed away. The clothes of the family, which were kept in a closet in the wall, could not be got at until they were reduced to a condition absolutely useless. The bedding, though not burnt—as it had been thrown out by the first man who entered the cottage—was

bedaubed with mud, and completely drenched. Only the bare walls, or rather a part of them, remained standing. The roof, every bit of woodwork, and most of the furniture were consumed. Andrew's crib, a large walnut-wood chest—which had contained Bridget's marriage outfit and house-linen—and a few old chairs were, in addition to the crockery and cooking utensils already mentioned, all that had escaped the general wreck. The poor widow gazed at the remnant of her possessions with a desolate air: she was poor yesterday, now she was destitute and wretched.

Dame Nixon, who all this time had been busier with her tongue than with her hands, wanted Bridget to go home with her; but Bridget shrank from her company, more even than usual—she knew there was no comfort or sympathy to be expected from that hard, sour nature—and said she would rather stay with the children, who had already taken refuge in a corner of the bakehouse, which still boasted the shelter of a roof. There they all three passed the remainder of the night,

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buddled together on Andrew's little mattress, with his bed-clothes to cover them. Jack and Madeline soon fell asleep, worn out with the unusual fatigue and excitement, and, childlike, able to forget their sorrows in sleep. Their mother, now that there was no one by to see her weakness, broke down completely ; she sat leaning against the wall, with Jack's head resting on her lap and Madeline at her feet, and cried bitterly, and crying seemed to ease her grief. For by-and-by her tears ceased to flow, and as the slow hours passed, a sort of weary, resigned feeling came over her.

Presently the day began to dawn, and as the sun was rising she fancied she heard a far-off sound of wheels. The thought that it might be Mrs. Tenassy and Blanche returning to the Castle instantly flashed upon her like a ray of unexpected light in the darkness. She did not move or wake the children, being still in doubt whether it was really a carriage she heard : the cracking of the postilion's whip, as he drove into the village, soon, however, made the doubt a certainty. The carriage must pass that way.

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She roused the children, and almost before they were on their feet, the postilion, seeing the smoking ruins, had pulled up his horses, and Mrs. Tenassy and Blanche were hurrying towards them. In a few minutes all was told. Bridget and her children were made to get into the carriage, their portable possessions were stowed away in the rumble with Mrs. Tenassy's luggage, and they all drove off to the Castle together. Bridget had ventured to remonstrate, but Mrs. Tenassy insisted, and the poor woman's natural shyness and reserve soon melted away. There were so many questions to be asked and answered—so many explanations to be given! Blanche wanted to hear everything from the very beginning—how, when, and where the fire began, and how and when it was put out. All that she had been doing and seeing since she left home was forgotten. How long it seemed since yesterday when she parted from her cousins; how insignificant they and their interests now appeared to her; how contemptible their love of fine clothes, their giddy frivolity,

compared to Madeline and her misfortunes, her devotion to her duty, her thoughtfulness and quiet good sense !

The carriage drew up, and all the servants, with Nanny at their head, came out to welcome the travellers home. It would be hard to say who was the happiest of the three—Mrs. Tenassy, Nanny, or Blanche—as they kissed each other again and again.

Bridget and the children were soon comfortably installed in a room on the ground floor, supplied with everything they could possibly want for the present, and charged over and over again not to be anxious about the future. Not to trust Mrs. Tenassy would have been as impossible as not to love her. Every look and word inspired confidence, and Bridget felt that she had reached a haven of rest and peace, and had nothing left to do but be grateful.





#### CHAP. XIV.—BLANCHE'S CORRESPONDENCE.

**T**HIS was just three months ago since Bridget's cottage was burnt. Blanche was sitting beside her mother, diligently sewing; she was making some linen collars and cuffs, under her mother's superintendence, and seemed very much interested in her work. They exchanged a few words from time to time, but Blanche did not often raise her eyes from the band she was stitching.

“I shall finish the collar to-day, I hope, mother; and—if I may?—take it and the sleeves to Madeline to-night. Nanny will go with me, I know.”

“Certainly, my darling, you may,” said Mrs. Tenassy, tenderly. “I am glad you should do anything that gives you pleasure, you have been so good and industrious this week.”

"Have I really, mother?"

"Yes; I am very much pleased with you, for I have observed the efforts you have been making lately to overcome your old idle habits."

These words made Blanche feel so happy that she jumped up and kissed her mother with delight, as she said—

"Are you really satisfied with me? I am so glad."

"It is to prove to you that I am, that I have put it in your power to do good to others. I can give you no better reward—none that gives more lasting pleasure."

"I was not called upon to do more than have Bridget's cottage rebuilt, and keep her and her children here until it was ready for them to live in; but I chose to do more, and do it through you, that you might feel the blessedness of helping and relieving with your own hands the wants and sorrows of those who are less fortunate than you."

"Yes, and I have felt it, and feel it every day; nothing gives me so much pleasure."

"I knew it would, I told you so; the less

one thinks about one's own pleasure, the happier one is sure to be. But there is something I have not told you yet."

"What, mother? Tell me; will you?"

"Not just yet—not now. It is to be a surprise, and you must know nothing about it beforehand. Finish your work, be quite good all day, and this evening at sunset you will know what my secret was."

"Is it a secret that will make me very happy, mother?"

"Very happy, I hope; because the pleasure will be shared by another."

"What can it be, I wonder. Let's see."

And Blanche tried hard to think what the secret could possibly be, but in vain; and she and her mother went on talking about other things. She was quite a companion to her mother now, and always had ever so many things she wanted to tell her and ask her about.

People said that Mrs. Tenassy looked much better than she had looked for a long while. And it was true; she was happy about Blanche now.

Whilst they were still at work that morning, a letter came for Blanche from Eulalie. They had agreed, when they parted, to write to each other, but this was the first letter that had made its appearance, and Blanche had not lost much, as she confessed when she had read it. It ran as follows :—

“ MY DEAR BLANCHE,

“ I wonder what you are about ? I hope you are having plenty of fun ? It’s a great pity you are not here still, for the more the merrier. If it weren’t for that tiresome Miss Duval we should be very jolly, but she bothers us from morning till night ; she is always trying to make us believe that people won’t care about us when we are grown-up, if we do not ‘ cultivate our minds,’ as she calls it—‘ do our lessons better,’ she means—that carriages and fine clothes do not make people fond of one. It’s such nonsense, and we wish her anywhere when she begins to talk in that way. The worst is, that if she were to go there would still be no peace, because we

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should have another like her, so we must try and bear it a few years longer. Now I've written enough about tiresome Miss Duval, and must tell you about our new silk dresses—sky-blue, with pink rosebuds scattered all over them just anyhow. They are perfectly lovely ; we had them on yesterday for the first time, and they fit beautifully. We've got sashes, with long ends to match, with great big wide bows ; I wish you could see them. We say we should like always to be dressed in silk ; only common people ought to wear cotton and woollen dresses.

“I hope you think of us sometimes, and have not forgotten all the fun we had when you were here. It would be jolly if you were here now, there are such lots of visitors—not old ones, but young, so that there is no fuss and bother about being obliged to behave properly, and be polite and respectful, and all that kind of thing. We are having holidays too, in spite of Miss Duval’s long face when she was told. Good-bye. Write soon, and tell us what you have been doing. I hope you have been having a good time ; if you

haven't, I'm very sorry for you. Alice and I both send you our love.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"EULALIE ST. CLAIR."

Blanche did not say a word when she had read the letter.

"Well, dear," said her mother, "what do you think of it?"

"It's not a particularly nice letter, mother, I think."

"Wouldn't you like to change places with your cousins?"

"I like my own better, thank you, mother, a good deal."

"Are you not very much to be pitied for being expected to do your lessons, and work regularly every day without grumbling?—for having been taught not to make fun of other people, and for having to wear woollen frocks?"

"Dearest mother," said Blanche, laughing, "you know well enough that I'm ten thousand times happier than my cousins. Think of all the pleasures I have; theirs are nothing com-

pared to mine. I couldn't count mine, even if I were to try."

"What shall you write to Eulalie?"

"Nothing. What could I say?"

"Well, she asks you to tell her what you have been doing—whether you have been having a good time. Those questions you might answer, I should think; mightn't you?"

"Why, she and Alice would only laugh at me if I did. My life is so different from theirs, particularly since I came back. It's funny. I amused myself very much when I was there. I shouldn't have for long, though, I expect; it was all very well just for a little. But, all the same, perhaps I had better write. I'll do it now, as I've done my collar; if they do laugh at me, I don't mind."

And she fetched her writing-desk, and wrote the following letter:—

"MY DEAR EULALIE,

"I am very glad you and Alice seem to be so happy, for I am too—in a different way of course from you, because I have no

sister to play with, and we live quite in the country. I am getting on much better now with my lessons. You know I told you that I used often to cry because they seemed so hard ; but I never do now, because I like them so much. The desk on which I am writing to you, and this paper, were presents mother gave me for taking pains with my arithmetic and my history. She explains everything so clearly to me, and is never angry if I cannot understand at once ; and she makes the lessons so interesting, that the time does not seem a bit long. I am often surprised when the clock strikes twelve, and mother tells me to run off into the garden and play. I am sure you too would like having lessons with mother. Sometimes in my play-time I go for a walk in the park with Nanny or mother, or else we go down to the village to see the poor people, or order something at the shop—Madeline's shop and mine, I mean ; do you remember I told you about it ? Often there's something to be carried to a sick man or woman in the village—jelly or soup or pudding which mother has had made for

them in our kitchen. That's one of the things I like best doing. And then my great friend lives in the village, and I'm sure to see her each time I go. She is very poor, and has to work hard all day ; but she is so good, that mother always says I cannot do better than try to be like her. I am afraid you would laugh at my calling her my friend, because she has not got fine clothes to wear ; but in the country no one wears fine clothes, we should only spoil them walking in the fields and climbing over the stiles. We couldn't go and feed the chickens and work in our gardens in silk frocks. I have got two such beautiful hens of my own—one has hatched six eggs, and the other is still sitting, but her eggs too will be hatched soon, I expect. Nanny and I go and feed them every day. But, best of all, I should like to show you my garden ; it is full of flowers and vegetables, for it is divided into a flower garden and a kitchen garden. On one side of the kitchen garden there is a large pear-tree, and on the other a hedge of currant bushes ; all the fruit and vegetables are for our shop. As soon as



FEEDING THE CHICKENS.



they are ready, Nanny and I cut them, and take them down to Madeline. In the afternoon, mother and I do needlework together; she teaches me to make collars and sleeves and pinafores, and things like that, for Madeline to sell. I used to hate needlework, but I don't now, because it's helping Madeline; and then mother and I have such cosy talks together, and tell each other all kinds of amusing things. The days seem so short, that I'm always surprised when bed-time comes. Now I must say good-bye, for I've answered all your questions. I kiss you both, and remain,

“Your affectionate cousin,

“BLANCHE TENASSY.”





## CHAP. XV.—THE SURPRISE.

**T**HIS was a summer evening. Bridget, who still looked weak and pale, was sitting at her cottage door, eating her evening meal of bread and milk, in company with Jack and Andrew. They made a pretty picture, these three figures in the doorway, set in a frame of vine leaves. Bridget's cottage was a cottage of content, if not of plenty. The inhabitants were now at least free from all the most pressing wants of life, and had food, clothing, and fuel, as much as they required. Though Bridget had never regained the strength she had lost in the two first years of her widowhood, she managed by her needlework to add something to the general store, and by taking the cares of housekeeping off Madeline's shoulders, left her free to attend to the shop.

When they had finished eating their supper, Madeline joined the little group ; she had been in-doors, putting away for the night—the fruit and vegetables in the cellar, the other things in a cupboard out of the dust.

“ What a fine evening ; we might have prayers out here, mother, in the open air, mightn’t we ? ”

“ Yes, by all means,” said Bridget. “ Come and kneel here beside me, Jack, and you on this side, Andrew.”

“ My spade ! I want my spade ! ” cried the restless little Andrew, who always thought prayers too long, and liked to provide himself with some favourite possession to beguile the time. The spade was given him, and all knelt down, whilst Madeline repeated a prayer her mother had taught her, followed by the Lord’s Prayer, in which they all joined, even Andrew, who was busy shovelling the sand into a crevice under the threshold.

Whilst Madeline was praying, she thought she heard steps approaching from the back of the cottage. The sound distracted her, for it

was a sound as of many feet—some, quick, soft, and pattering, others more slow and steady. “That was how his steps used to sound,” she thought to herself; “my own little Loulou. What a darling he was!” But she quickly recovered herself, and finished the prayer without again allowing her mind to wander.

Hardly, however, had they all risen from their knees, when the quick, soft, pattering steps and the tinkling sound of a bell were explained by the sudden apparition of a big, white, fluffy lamb round the corner.

“Loulou, I declare! it really is!” they all exclaimed with one accord, throwing up their hands in amazement. Andrew threw down his spade, and ran and threw his arms round the lamb’s neck, whilst Madeline and Jack covered his soft white back with kisses.

Bridget felt bewildered. “How could it be? had not Loulou been sold to the butcher? had not the butcher paid for him, and killed him? had they not bought that—and that—and that—for the money?”

So they believed; but another heart, the



**RETURN OF THE PET LAMB.**



heart of a mother, had felt for Bridget in her trouble, and a kind hand had been stretched out to dry Madeline's tears.

Soon Blanche and Nanny came out of their hiding-place ; they had waited behind the haystack to watch the result of their little plan. Blanche was so delighted, she could hardly speak, it is true ; so many questions were put to her, all in a moment, that she did not know which to answer first.

"Here are two chairs," said Bridget ; "now sit down, Miss Blanche, and you too, Mrs. Nanny ; and tell us, pray, where does Loulou come from ? where has he been ? and who brought him back to Madeline ? Why, look, the child's crying for joy, I declare !"

"I know how it was," put in Jack ; "he was so pretty, the butcher couldn't make up his mind to kill him—I'm sure he couldn't !"

"Ah, well ! I don't know about that," said Nanny ; "I don't fancy the butcher cares much whether a lamb's pretty or not ; pretty or ugly, it's all the same to him, so long as the meat's good."

"Miss Blanche, I wish you would tell us Loulou's history; now, pray, do!" pleaded Madeline, and she laid her hand caressingly on the lamb's head, as if to make quite sure of his being actually there.

"This," answered Blanche, "is the whole story. I have got the kindest mother in the whole world—kinder than you've any idea of. One day I cried, Madeline, because I had seen you crying."

"Really!"

"Yes, it was down by the stream, where the grass is so thick and green. You had sat down there on your way to the butcher. You were going to sell Loulou, and you had stopped to say good-bye to him. You thought no one would see you crying, and you did cry so bitterly!"

"I know," said Madeline, and she sighed as she remembered how unhappy she was that day.

"I wished to save the lamb's life, because you loved it so, and I asked mother to help me; but I had been idle and disobedient and naughty, and she told me I did not deserve the pleasure

of doing a good action. It was quite true. I know now what a pleasure it is, and feel how little I deserved it then. But what do you think mother did after that? She never said a word about it to me, though—only nurse knew; she bought the lamb from the butcher, and one of our farmers has been taking care of it all this time. That was three months ago, and mother and nurse kept the secret so well that I did not even know they had one until to-day, when mother told me that, as I had been taking such pains lately to overcome my bad habits, and to become more industrious and obedient, and she wished to encourage me to persevere, she was going to reward me by giving me something very pleasant to do this evening, something that I had asked her to let me do a long time ago. Then she made me go down to the farm-yard with her, and there I saw Loulou, grown bigger and fatter, and more soft and woolly, but still it was Loulou, and no mistake; and she put a string round his neck, and said, ‘Take him and give him back to Madeline.’ That’s the end of my story.”

Madeline had been listening with rapt attention to every word, and now kissed, first Blanche's hand, and then the lamb's head. Bridget's eyes were wet with tears, Mrs. Tenassy's kind and tender sympathy for her poor neighbours' griefs touched her deeply. The boys and the lamb were soon at play together ; and when Nanny ventured to remark that Loulou did not remember his little mistress, Madeline exclaimed—

“ Oh, but he does, I'm sure ! He couldn't have forgotten me ; one never forgets those one has once loved.”

Blanche agreed ; and when, a moment afterwards, Loulou ran into the cottage, and made his way to the corner where his basin of milk used to stand, she said, “ He's quite at home, you see.”

By this time it was growing quite dusk, and Nanny called to Blanche, saying it was time to be going. As the two girls wished each other good-night, Blanche, in a low voice, repeated Madeline's words—“ One never forgets those one has once loved !”



## CHAP. XVI.—COURAGE AND FRANKNESS.

**T**It was autumn, and the dead leaves that strewed the ground rustled under the feet of the three young girls who, arm-in-arm, were pacing the wide avenue of the Castle of St. Foy. They were talking eagerly of all they meant to do whilst some one, who apparently had just driven away, was absent.

The three girls were Blanche, Alice, and Eulalie, and they had just been to the gate to see Miss Duval, Alice's and Eulalie's governess, drive off for a fortnight's holiday. Mrs. St. Clair had been suddenly called away from home to nurse a sick brother, and she expected that her absence would be a long one, and did not like to leave her daughters to the sole charge of their grandmother, with whom they were no favourites; she had asked Mrs. Tenassy to

allow them to come to St. Foy. Ill as she had succeeded in the training of her girls, she still knew how to appreciate the value of Mrs. Tenassy's system of education, and hoped that their stay at St. Foy would be in every way of the greatest advantage to them. Mrs. Tenassy, little as she desired such companions for Blanche, did not like to refuse her cousin's request, and so it had been decided that, provided Miss Duval came too, the girls were to come to St. Foy whilst their mother was absent from home. Miss Duval was to have a fortnight's holiday to begin with, but was then to return and relieve Mrs. Tenassy of the responsibility of looking after her two giddy pupils.

They arrived, and at first everything went well. The charm of novelty made life at St. Foy seem delightful to the new-comers ; in fact, the general atmosphere of peace and order that prevailed under Mrs. Tenassy's roof could not but exercise a good influence on all those who breathed it.

From the first moment, Eulalie, and more especially Alice, seemed to grow more sensible,

less proud and scornful, and less frivolous than they were at home. They were delighted with everything, interested in everything, and generally agreeable to everybody.

And now Miss Duval had just left ; but the good-byes of the two sisters had expressed very different feelings. Eulalie's seemed to imply : A pleasant journey to you ; and stay away as long as you can. Alice's, on the other hand : I hope you'll have a good time with all your people ; and when you come back, I mean to try and please you better.

Miss Duval had felt the difference between the two girls for some time ; she had always fancied that at the bottom of her heart Alice really was fond of her, and that if only she had some one to set her a good example, she would rapidly improve.

The holidays were given up to amusements, but amusements of the most simple and natural kind. Out-door games, excursions into the woods, blackberry-gathering, drives in Blanche's pony-carriage, made the days seem to fly. Alice's enjoyment was more evident than

Eulalie's. Country pleasures had a much greater charm for her than for her sister, and all the sights and sounds at St. Foy were a new source of delight to her. And then by-and-by she and Blanche found that they had a great deal in common, and though at first she used, as Nanny said, "to play the princess and give herself airs," and affect supreme contempt for any one who, like Blanche, could excite herself about a stupid rabbit or a great ugly cabbage, or care to go into a dirty straw-yard and talk to the cows, her prejudices disappeared one by one, and often, when Mrs. Tenassy set off on her daily round of inspection after breakfast, she would ask leave to go too and visit the dairy, the stables, the farm, and the fruit garden.

Mrs. Tenassy always welcomed her little companion most heartily, for she was glad to see her beginning to show a taste for more healthy occupations than changing her dress and arranging her hair before the looking-glass.

And one day, quite of her own accord, Alice began to tell her how she wished to leave off



**GOOD RESOLUTIONS.**



being idle and foolish and vain, as she knew she had been until now—of the feeling she had that somehow it would be easier at St. Foy, and her determination, as soon as Miss Duval came back, to turn over a new leaf, if only Mrs. Tenassy would help her.

"My dear child, of course I will, in every possible way," was Mrs. Tenassy's ready answer, as she put her arms round Alice's neck and kissed her. "I am so glad to hear you say all this, for if you really wish to grow better and wiser you are sure to become so in time—wishing to become so is the first step, it helps us to find out the next. But I think I can tell you directly what the next step should be. If I were you, I should write to Miss Duval this very day, and say the same to her that you have just been saying to me. It would be such a pleasure to her, for I know that she has often been very unhappy about you, Alice dear; and then, too, she will be all the more patient and indulgent when she comes back—she will be ready to meet you half-way, and help you to keep your good resolutions."

“Very well, if you think so, I will write directly after dinner, only——”

“Only what?”

“Eulalie will laugh at me!”

“Very likely, and that's the first difficulty you must get over, if you want to begin to be good and industrious, instead of being silly and idle. You will be laughed at, no doubt; but if you take no notice, people will soon be tired of laughing; and if they are not, never mind—go on just the same—their laughing cannot harm you if you are doing what is right.”

“I am afraid I shan't be able to help minding, though, I do so hate being laughed at.”

“I daresay; so do most girls; but you'll mind less and less if you persevere. Every change is difficult at first; to leave the habitual and the old way, and enter on a new way, is always hard. You must ask God to help you; ask Him in your prayers every day, and you will see it will become quite easy in time.”

“If you think so, I am sure it will; and if you let me come and talk to you like this sometimes, and tell me what I am to do, that

will be a great help. I shall write to Miss Duval directly after dinner, and tell her all we have been talking about."

Here their conversation was interrupted by the gardener, who came to ask Mrs. Tenassy whether he should not begin to gather and stow away the apples before the wind shook any more of them down, as they got so bruised in falling. Alice left them, and walked up the kitchen garden walk to have a look at the great tall sunflowers she was so fond of, and see if Blanche was in her favourite seat in the green walk. But there was no one there ; it was a calm clear day, a day with silver clouds and sunshine on the grass, and she sat down on Blanche's seat under the apple-tree, and thought of the new resolutions she had made, and hoped she should be able to keep them. She sat on there a long time ; the perfect stillness, broken only now and then by an acorn in the grove of oaks close by, dislodged from its cup, rustling through the dry leaves, or dropping at once to the earth with a startling sound, was so pleasant.

She could not help thinking, as she had

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often thought since she came to St. Foy, how easy it would be to be good there. Nothing ever seemed to rub her up the wrong way now; people never said disagreeable, spiteful things of each other behind each other's backs, nor seemed to care much what kind of clothes they wore, or how their hair was dressed, as long as they looked clean and tidy. She wondered why it was all so different here, and then she wondered what Eulalie would say when she heard about the letter she meant to write to Miss Duval ; that reminded her that it must be nearly dinner-time. Francis had just passed up the walk to his cottage ; that told her it must be one o'clock. So she got up and went back to the Castle, and had just had time to wash her hands and brush her hair when the dinner-bell rang.

After dinner she went straight to the school-room and wrote her letter, disregarding Eulalie's remark that she was going to change her dress and do her hair for the afternoon, and that she had better come too. The letter she wrote was as follows :—

“DEAR MISS DUVAL,

“You will, I daresay, be very much surprised when you read this letter, because it is to tell you that I mean to try and be quite different when you come back. I want not to be idle and stupid any longer, but to work hard so as to make up for all the time I have wasted. You have often said that I knew nothing really well, and that I learned like a parrot, without understanding or trying to understand the meaning of what I learned. Now if you will let me begin again from the very beginning, I promise to attend to all you say, and make better use of my time in future.

“I really mean what I say, so please you must believe me. I shall be so glad when you come back, for I am in a great hurry to begin to be diligent.

“I remain your affectionate pupil,

“ALICE ST. CLAIR.”

Two days after this letter had been sent, Alice received the following answer from Miss Duval :—

“**MY DEAREST ALICE,**

“I cannot tell you the pleasure your letter gave me. I have already almost forgotten the silly, idle, giddy Alice I left behind me, in thinking of the new Alice who is so impatient for my return. We will, as you say, ‘begin again from the very beginning,’ and you shall learn nothing without thoroughly understanding it. You will have need of a great deal of patience at first, but I will make it as easy as I can for you. If you will get up an hour earlier in the morning, I will too, and we will spend that hour in going over what you have learned without understanding, and you will be surprised to see how quickly you will get on, and how pleasant your studies will become. Good-bye, dearest. In a few days we shall meet again; and though I shall be very sorry to leave all I love here, your letter has made the parting less hard, as I now feel that you will be glad, instead of sorry, to see me again. With a kiss to you both,

“I remain your loving friend,

“ADELE DUVAL.”



#### CHAX. XVII.—DAME NIXON BREAKS HER LEG.

DAME NIXON was down at the pool washing. Mrs. Tenassy had had the stream dammed up, and a shed built just outside the orchard wall for the convenience of the villagers of St. Foy, and the place presented a busy scene on washing-days. Dame Nixon loved washing-day better than any other day in the week—gossiping and washing go so well together—and if her hands worked hard, so did her tongue. She was reckoned one of the best washerwomen in the place, and people said no wonder, because she was always the first at the pool in the morning, and the last to leave it at night; there was not another woman in the place who rinsed out her clothes so often as Dame Nixon did—not one, either, whose tongue wagged so ceaselessly. When you passed the

place, you were sure always to hear her voice far above the others.

" Well, so the governess has come back, I hear—a great big yellow-faced creature she is, they say ; and the lady's maid told the kitchen maid, who told old Lubin's girl that goes to the Castle for milk every morning, that one of the young ladies has turned good all of a sudden, and will have it she's to be woke every morning at six for lessons, whilst the other lies a-bed till nine, and is as cross as two sticks all day. And then there's Miss Blanche between the two, as good as gold, and as meek as a lamb. They say the governess looks better too, poor soul ! now she's only got one to worry her. Gracious ! what plagues children are, to be sure ; thank heaven I've none ; they'd drive me wild, they would, in no time !"

" Bless my heart, Dame Nixon, how you do go on !" said a little old woman who was washing her Sunday cap.

" Go on ? yes, and so I shall go on, if it pleases me. Take my word for it, no child of mine would ever have been spoilt ; they'd have

had to go my way, I'll answer for it. I hate children, big and little—they're all alike."

"Bah!" rejoined the other; "one likes them when one's got them, and so would you, fast enough. With patience, they improve. Look at Miss Blanche now, how good she is; and so troublesome as she used to be, you would hardly believe it, to see her now; and her cousin, she's every bit as nice."

"Nice? You call that being nice, do you? But what do I stay chattering here for? I must make haste home, or I shall be late."

"As usual," said a merry red-faced woman, in a low voice, at the farther end of the shed.

"As usual?" retorted Dame Nixon, whose sharp ears caught the words; "and what business is it of yours, I should like to know, eh?"

And, planting her fists firmly on her sides, she levelled a torrent of abuse at the speaker, who, however, had the good sense to take no further notice of her; and when the old woman had exhausted her vocabulary and her breath, and packed her wet clothes into her basket, she walked off muttering with it on her back.

Poor Dame Nixon ! she had not gone many steps when a horse, coming full gallop in an opposite direction, threw her down headlong, basket and all. The horse was the butcher's, and had been tied up at the door of the shop waiting for his master; some noise had frightened him, and he had broken loose, and leapt the fence just beyond, that separated the meadow from the road. Before any of the other women could reach the spot where Dame Nixon lay, with her heels in the air, uttering stifled cries for help, two girls, who had come running out from a little door that led out of the orchard into the meadow, were beside her, releasing her from the basket and the pile of clothes under which she was buried, and trying to raise her from the ground. But their efforts were of no use, for it appeared that the poor old creature's leg was broken.

Blanche and Alice, for they it was who had so promptly come to the rescue, soon fetched the gardener and two of his men, and she was carried back to her cottage, screaming with pain, and scolding all the way. Alice ran up



DAME NIXON'S MISFORTUNE.



to the Castle and told Mrs. Tenassy what had happened, and was desired to follow Blanche to the cottage and find out what was wanted for the relief of the sufferer.

When the girls entered the cottage, they were amazed at its wretched appearance: the dirt and disorder were such as they had never seen before. The scanty furniture was in the last stage of decay, and among the dirty cups and plates that stood in a confused heap in the corner of the dresser, there did not seem to be one that was not broken or cracked.

And it was not much to be wondered at. Dame Nixon was seldom at home, for had she not everybody else's business to mind first of all? For her own she had very little time left.

Bridget arrived not many minutes after the men had deposited their burden on the bed, and set to work immediately, with the help of the two girls, to undress Dame Nixon, who did not scruple to swear roundly at them all three for hurting her. One of the men had been sent to fetch the doctor, and another to tell Madeleine to give the boys their dinner, and send

some broth for Dame Nixon. Meanwhile, Alice and Blanche tried to make the wretched room look a little less wretched, by putting things straight, clearing away the cups and plates, and sweeping up the hearth. It was no pleasant task ; the things were all so dirty that they could hardly bear to touch them, and Dame Nixon grumbled and scolded at all they did.

When they went home and described it all to Mrs. Tenassy, and expressed their disgust at what they had seen, she told them that here was an opportunity of doing good to others when the work would not be a pleasant one, as it had been in Bridget and Madeline's case, but disagreeable and difficult ; that the duty was as binding in the one case as the other, and that she hoped she should see Blanche quite as anxious and ready to do everything in her power towards helping Dame Nixon as she had been to help Madeline. "Your self-sacrifice," Mrs. Tenassy said, "was rendered comparatively easy then by the gratitude and affection it called forth ; now, if you determine, as I hope you will, to give up some

part of your play-time every day in order to visit this poor, cross, ungrateful old woman, and get over your repugnance to going into her dirty room, and hearing her grumble and complain, and speak ill of her neighbours, your self-sacrifice will be much greater, because it will not be pleasant. You will have your reward, and a higher kind of reward, the consciousness of having done your duty only because it was your duty. Well, what do you say ? are you disposed to undertake this disagreeable duty ? You are not obliged to do it ; I can send one of the servants in your place every day to take her the necessary comforts, and cheer her by a little visit ?”

“Really, mother, I hardly know what to say. I understand quite well what you mean, but—— Alice, what do you mean to do ?”

“Just what you do.”

“Then I’ve made up my mind ; it will be easier for two of us together.”

“You are good girls, both of you ; and, to begin with, we’ll go all three of us after dinner, and hear the result of the doctor’s visit.”



### CHAP. XVIII.—MISS EULALIE.

**N**ANNY is sitting in her great arm-chair, knitting and crooning over an old ditty to herself—a ditty that must be sixty years old at least. She has grown younger, every one says; and she believes herself she has. The fact is, she is much happier than she used to be, and happiness always makes people younger. Everything went on so smoothly and peaceably now at the Castle. Blanche had become such a good daughter to her mother, and Mrs. Tenassy never had a moment's uneasiness on her account, for she saw her growing up all that she wished her to be. And these two, Blanche and her mother, were as usual, of course, the chief subject of Nanny's thoughts when she was alone. Presently they were interrupted by three little raps at the door, which were followed by the entrance of Miss

Eulalie, looking very smart and supercilious. Let no one think—Nanny certainly did not—for one moment that this grand young lady had come to pay a friendly visit to the old nurse, to sit down on the little stool and have a chat with her. She had been sent with a message from Mrs. Tenassy, to save old Nanny's legs the trouble of going up and down stairs more than was absolutely necessary ; and now that she was there, she walked round the room scrutinising everything with a contemptuous air, whilst Nanny was looking for the needles and tape Mrs. Tenassy wanted.

Nanny was in a very good humour that day, and felt disposed to try and make Miss Eulalie talk ; but she could get nothing but “yes” and “no,” “certainly,” “of course,” and short answers such as these, out of her ; all uttered in such a disdainful tone, and with such an air of superiority, that Nanny stood and looked at her over her spectacles, and decided she was the oddest piece of goods she had ever set eyes on.

“I've got a letter to write,” said Miss St. Clair, and abruptly left the room.

The letter she wrote was to her dearest friend, and ran as follows :—

“ My DEAR ERNESTINE,

“ I am literally being bored to death ! St. Foy is the dullest place I ever was in ; the life here is beyond all description tedious. We never see a soul but the vicar and the doctor, and they are both as old as the hills. Here, in the Castle, people do nothing but their ‘duty ;’ it’s their one pleasure, and they all sing the same song from morning till night, in most harmonious strains. My poor sister joins in the concert ; only fancy ! and has quite deserted me ; the fact is, she has turned good, and you would hardly know her again. Listen and wonder ! She gets up at six, is dressed in half-an-hour, does her hair like a school-girl, wears the same dress all the week, and hardly ever looks at herself in the glass unless it is to see that her face is clean ! I consider she’s lost—done for !

“ Poor girl ! if you could only see how hard she works, too ; she and Miss Duval are at it



MISS ST. CLAIR.

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long before breakfast, and seem to have begun all over again from the beginning, at their A B C, and two and two are four. I happened to run into the schoolroom this morning, before I was dressed, to look for a rosette that had come off my shoe, and heard her going through all the names of the departments on a skeleton map, pointing at each with her finger as she said it ; and when she got to the end without a mistake, she clapped her hands for joy !

“Can you believe it ? I laugh at her as often as I can, it’s my only amusement ; but she doesn’t seem to care about being laughed at now, though we know how she used to hate it.

“Miss Duval tries to persuade me to follow Alice’s example, and ‘do my duty ;’ but it would be such a grind, for I really know nothing at all, and should have to begin all over again from the very beginning. However, who knows what I may do, if I stay here much longer, out of sheer desperation ? Good-bye, and think of me and pity me, for I deserve it.

“Your affectionate friend,

“EULALIE ST. CLAIR.”



## CHAP. XIX.—THE LAST ADDITION TO NANNY'S TREASURE.

MADELINE'S shop was prospering famously, and she herself had developed into a thorough little woman of business. She managed her time so well that she had leisure for everything, and whatever she did, she did with all her might. Now that Dame Nixon was laid up, she made a point of seeing her every evening when she shut up shop, to get her supper, shake up her bed, and bandage her leg.

It cost her a struggle now and then, when she felt very tired, or wanted to prepare her lessons for the confirmation class, to which she now went twice a-week ; but she never yielded to the temptation to stay at home. On this particular night it had been unusually hard for

her to make up her mind to go, and Andrew had entreated her to stay and play with him.

"No, dear, you must let go," she said, as she gently loosened his hold on her skirt. "If you're good, I promise to come and sit on your bed and tell you a story when I come back."

This was Andrew's greatest treat, and he let her go directly.

"Is that you, lazy girl?" was Dame Nixon's greeting, as Madeline opened her door.

"Am I late, then—later than usual?"

"Later than usual! you're very late, that's all I know; it's a shame to keep me waiting. Now, bandage my leg, and lose no time talking."

Madeline fetched the clean bandages, and, kneeling down by the bed, set to work at once to do what was required of her. She had to swallow a good many hard words, for Dame Nixon was in great pain, and said that it was Madeline's fault for being so clumsy. Madeline had bound up her leg twice, because Dame Nixon was not satisfied, and was patiently making a third attempt, when the peevish old woman seized her arm and pushed her away, exclaiming—

"Get along with you, do, you awkward thing, and don't come near me again. My leg would have been well by this time if you hadn't come meddling with it!"

Her anger terrified Madeline so, that she left the cottage in tears. On coming into the moonlight she encountered Blanche and Nanny, who brought a sleeping draught the doctor had recommended.

When they heard what had happened, Blanche entreated Madeline not to cry; but Madeline could not be comforted, "for," she said, "she has driven me away, and her leg isn't bandaged, and she'll have to stay like that all night." Whilst Nanny was asking further particulars, Blanche, without their noticing it, had disappeared. Moved by a sudden inspiration, she had tied her handkerchief round her head, taken off her rings and white wristbands, and trusting that, in her dark woollen dress, by the dim light of Dame Nixon's little lamp, she might pass for Madeline, had slipped into the cottage, shutting the door softly behind her.

"So there you are back again, you little

fool! How dared you leave me like that? Come, make haste now and do up my bandages."

Without saying a word, for fear of being found out, Blanche kneeled down beside the bed, and began the difficult task of winding the bandage round Dame Nixon's leg.

"Not so tight! What are you about? Have you lost your senses? Tighter! do you hear? Why, you're more clumsy than ever! I believe you're making game of me! I'll teach you!"

Blanche, who had never been spoken to so roughly before, grew very nervous, and again and again let the bandage slip; till all of a sudden Dame Nixon in a rage, clutching her so violently by the collar that it gave way in her grasp, pushed her away from her. Blanche's first thought was to run away, but she remembered what her mother had said about the duty of doing good to others, even when it was difficult and disagreeable, and, summoning up all her courage, she went back to her task, and, to her own surprise, succeeded this time to the dame's satisfaction. She did not get a word of thanks, or even a grateful look; but, though

her eyes filled with tears, she had an inward feeling of contentment, which was the reward her mother had said she would always find in doing a painful duty, for the sake of doing good.

Nanny, who opened the door unperceived, had been a silent witness of the whole scene.

“Her mother all over again! Haven’t I said so a thousand times? She’s every bit like her; just as good, and patient, and brave, thank God!” So thought Nanny, as she stood there with the door in her hand.

She went in as soon as Blanche had finished, and, without appearing to know what had happened, or letting the old woman know the deception practised upon her, gave her the sleeping draught, wished her good night, and set out with Blanche on the way home.

Blanche thought that none but God had seen what she had been doing; but, lifting the torn and crumpled collar, Nanny merely said—

“You can’t wear that collar again, child; give it to me; it’s a fancy of mine to have it.”

“Take it and welcome, Nounou dear, but it’s a poor sort of present to give you.”

"Never mind ; I can make some use of it."

When they reached home, Blanche went to her mother's room and told her in a few words what she had been doing, making light of the whole thing, for she shrank from being praised, even by her mother.

An hour later, when everybody else was asleep, Nounou might have been seen seated in her arm-chair, a candle on the table beside her, with the precious rosewood box on her lap ; she was handling the treasured relics lovingly, one by one, and making room for a new-comer that was now to be added to their number. This new treasure, which Nanny kissed before laying it in the box, was Blanche's torn collar : to it was pinned a piece of paper containing these words—ill-written and ill-spelt, but heartfelt and full of meaning to her who with trembling hand had penned them :—

"Blanche's collar, torn by a spiteful old woman, whose leg she was dressing. Blanche has become good and unselfish, like her mother ! Nounou's treasure is complete : 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace !'"



## CHAP. XX.—THE TWO LETTERS.

THE answer to Eulalie's letter to her friend was a long time in coming, and when it did come, it found Eulalie in a very different frame of mind from that in which she gave way to that outburst of discontent. Surprise that anything she could have said should have provoked such a letter; annoyance with herself for being so disgusted by its whole tone; pity for Ernestine, and mortified vexation at the thought that she had once looked upon her as a friend, were the feelings uppermost in her mind after reading the following:—

“ MY DEAR EULALIE,

“ What a picture you give of the state of things at St. Foy. Bored? No wonder you are bored; there's nothing more tiresome than doing one's duty. Poor Alice! so that's

what she's come to ! I'm sorry for her ; fancy choosing to get up at six and sit at lessons all day, and wear one dress all the week !

"But now I must make haste and tell you the dreadful misfortune that has happened to us ; your misery is nothing compared to mine, and I feel inclined to laugh at you for thinking you have anything to complain of. Things, as papa says, have gone badly with him ; he has been unlucky in business, has been cheated, has bad debts, has failed in his speculations ; all which means that we are ruined—that we must leave our beautiful house, send away our servants, give up the carriage, wear cheap ugly clothes, and make them ourselves. Everybody in the house is miserable and cross, and economy is the one subject of conversation from morning till night—where to go, what to do, how to live, are the only questions that are thought of. I hate everything and everybody, and am more wretched than words can express. Jeanne makes me worse, because she is so absurdly good and cheerful ; she has a way of 'making the best of everything,' as she calls it,

which makes me quite desperate. I really believe she loves economy, and likes old clothes better than new ones, or else she is very good at pretending. Then, too, she doesn't seem to have a bit of pride in her, for she goes about telling all our friends what has happened, and that we are going away from here because we are too poor to live in such a big house ; and asks them to help her to find something to do, by which she may earn money ; she actually told Ella the other day that she meant to try and get a governess' place, only she was afraid she knew so little that no one would care to have her. What is to become of me if I am to earn my own living I cannot conceive, for, except dancing and fancy-work, and laughing at the absurdities of my neighbours, there's nothing I can do really well. There, now I've had it all out, I feel better ; I've nobody to grumble to here, and I know you will pity me, for we always cared about the same things. Try and think how you would feel if you were in my place, and be thankful you are not. Miss Duval and her lessons, and the dutiful dowdy

folks around you, will seem less tiresome when you have read this letter from your unhappy

"ERNESTINE.

"P.S.—Do not write till you hear from me again, as we are to leave this place as soon as possible, and who knows where we shall be vegetating before another month has passed."

The letter which Alice received the same morning was from Jeanne, and ran thus:—

"MY DEAR LITTLE ALICE,

"You must have thought me very unkind for not having answered your delightful letter at once. You may be sure I longed to do so, for my one thought as I read it was, Oh ! if only I could see her and tell her how happy it makes me ! The description of your life at St. Foy made me quite envious. How very nice Mrs. Tenassy must be, and Blanche, and the old nurse too ; I seem to know them quite well, though I have never seen them. Every word in your letter interests me, and your account of the old woman with her head in her basket of wet clothes and her heels in the air,

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and the names she called you all when she found that she had broken her leg, was so funny. I could not help laughing.

"But the most interesting part of your letter to me, was what you say about yourself, and your having turned over a new leaf, and working so hard at your lessons with Miss Duval. You are a brave, good old girl, and will have grown so clever by the time I see you again that I shall hardly dare to speak to you. I only wish I could transport myself every morning into that blissful schoolroom you describe so eloquently, and hammer away at my lessons with you; wouldn't I just work if I had the chance! I have been feeling more oppressed than ever, lately, by my own ignorance and stupidity. Things have happened which have made me think more about my own uselessness and incapability than I ever did before. Poor papa is in great trouble; by no fault of his, but by the misfortunes of others, he has lost nearly all his money, and we have so little left to live on, that he says we must sell our dear old home and go and live in the

cheapest place we can find, in the cheapest possible way. It is a very hard trial for us all, but particularly for him and mamma; my brother, too, will have to leave college at once, and find some way of earning his own livelihood. I feel so sorry for him, poor fellow! he had so set his heart on finishing his studies and taking his degree; but he is young, and better able to bear hardships than papa and mamma. Ernestine is not well, and is in rather a trying state just now; which is a great pity, as it makes everything much more difficult than it need be. She has always cared so much more about change and dissipation and amusement than I have, and from having been so much admired for her good looks, likes to be very well dressed; and the thought of all she will have to give up and do without now, makes her terribly irritable and difficult to get on with just at first, but I hope she will see things in a more reasonable light soon.

“I fancy I hear you asking, ‘And Jeanne, how does she feel about it all?’ Well, Alice, Jeanne feels very differently at different times—very

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sad at the thought of leaving this dear old place, every stick and stone of which she knows by heart, and loves because she knows it. Oh, Alice! when I think of saying good-bye to all the dear familiar objects, each with its own distinct individuality seems to grow more dear to me. But I try not to dwell on all this, for it unfits me for what I have to do, and I have a great deal to do already, as our maid and mamma's have both left, and one of the housemaids too. You may imagine, therefore, that I cannot afford to sit down with my hands before me and mope; fortunately, you know I always had rather a taste for housekeeping. I was nicknamed Martha when I was quite a small child, because they said I was careful and troubled about many things; and now that it is my real business to be Martha, I find it rather pleasant than otherwise. But the worst is, that much as I would prefer staying at home, wherever that home may be, and however humble, I feel that if I can find any way of earning my own livelihood I must not hesitate to go. At eighteen I am almost too

young to be a governess, and I feel so wofully ignorant; but in a year's time, if I work hard, perhaps I may succeed in getting a situation as governess to some small children. Anyhow, I mean to keep my eyes and ears open to anything that may turn up. I believe I should make a capital servant, and wouldn't mind being house and parlour-maid to a clergyman in the country; but Arthur says, 'There are limits, and a servant you shall not be!' Poor Arthur! he is just at the age when boys think so much of appearances, and what people will say. But I am frightened at the length of my letter, and though I feel as if I could go on writing for ever so long, and yet not say all I want to say, I think I had better leave off. Give my love to Blanche; I seem to know her so well, though I have never seen her; and I like her for being so fond of you. I hope Eulalie is as happy at St. Foy as you are. Ernestine had a letter from her some time ago, but did not give it to me to read. Ernestine thinks so much of her, that I cannot but hope that, if St. Foy has the effect of making

her less idle and fond of amusement and dress, it will also influence Ernestine indirectly. Good-bye, my own dear friend. Yours affectionately,

"JEANNE."

"Please write to me soon again. You can address your letter here, for, should we have left, it is quite safe to be forwarded to us."

When these two letters reached St. Foy, the wide gap that had separated the St. Clairs at the time they last wrote to Jeanne and Ernestine had considerably lessened, and the feelings with which they were each looking forward to their approaching departure were more nearly the same than either could have believed three months ago they would ever be.

We watched the beginning of the change in Alice, but how is it that Eulalie, who wrote so contemptuously and derisively of her sister's zeal for learning, and of her "turning good"—who complained so bitterly of the dulness of their life at the Castle, should, like Alice, be counting the days she still had to spend there with regret that they should be so few?

If we follow her now, as she climbs over several rough and awkward stiles, and tramps energetically through a long muddy lane, and across two or three very marshy meadows, evidently with a very distinct object in view, we shall discover how it is that she does not spend so much time as she used to do before the looking-glass.

Down in a little dell, at the bottom of the last meadow she crossed, nestled a farm-house, inhabited by one of Mrs. Tenassy's tenants. A bright-faced girl of fourteen or thereabouts was standing at the gate, apparently on the look-out for Eulalie, for she called out, as soon as she descried her coming quickly down the hill, "She's ever so much better to-day, miss ; the doctor's just been, and says the danger's over."

"That's right ; and how's your mother ?"

"Mother's better too, she's having a long sleep this morning ; she was so tired out with nursing her, and with fretting, that I believe she'll sleep all day long if we let her."

Saying this, Lisa held open the gate for Eulalie, who went through the yard straight

into the low one-storied house, and, evidently quite at home, crossed the red-tiled kitchen, and entered a little room beyond, followed by Lisa. In a wooden crib by the wide hearth sat a child, whose small pale face and large blue eyes brightened at the sight of the two girls. Two little arms, cased in the sleeves of a soft white knitted jacket, were stretched out to Eulalie, and a weak, fretful little voice said, beseechingly, "Me want oo to come."

Eulalie stooped down, and the arms were clasped tightly round her neck ; and, wrapping a shawl round the little bare legs, she lifted the child and sat down with her by the fire.

Lisa set to work to make the child's bed ; she put fresh logs on the fire, tidied the room, and then busied herself in the kitchen preparing for the mid-day meal. She made no apology to Eulalie for leaving her with the child, as if it were quite a customary thing.

And so it had been for the last fortnight. The acquaintance, begun more than a month ago up in the large field on the top of the hill, had ripened into this. That little pale face

and those blue eyes, the outstretched arms and the tender entreaty, "Me want oo to come," had weaned Eulalie from her looking-glass and her silk dress.

Shortly after she wrote that letter to Ernestine, she had begun to go out of doors with some amusing story-book ; and her favourite resort was a gate which led from the oak-grove into the fields adjoining the park. There she would sit and devour her book with a sort of dogged rebellious feeling that every hand was against her—that she cared for nobody, and nobody cared for her. One day, however, she heard the sound of the ploughman's voice urging on his team as she came up the hill, and saw that one long stretch of grass was already turned into brown furrows. She clambered up to her usual post, and buried herself in her book, but her attention was soon diverted by the nearer approach of the plough. She wondered whether the work of the man who guided the plough was as easy as it looked ; the ploughshare seemed to cut into the soil as easily as into butter. Presently the clock in the steeple-

THE young master and the ploughman, when he got to the end of the field nearest the gate where she was sitting, stopped, took his horses out and led on their master's way. Almost at the same moment Estelle heard a clear voice, half-way down the hill calling, "Here we are, father!" The voice proved to be a girl's, and the "we" whose presence is proclaimed, a smiling number of four-year-old girls, and a crawling baby of two or three. The basket which besides the baby-girl contained the father's and brother's dinner, was unpacked and the whole party sat down. None of them noticed Estelle, and she did not venture to move for fear of disturbing them. When the meal was over, and the plough again at work, the girl perched the baby on her father's coat, and set out on an exploring expedition along the hedgerow in search of blackberries and other treasures. Her absence was longer than the baby thoroughly approved of; she began to fidget and whimper, and finally burst into a piteous wail. Estelle saw that the girl was too far off to hear, and after hesitating for a moment—

“Shall I? it would be no good; I shall only frighten it; and yet”—jumped down from her seat, and ran to try and comfort the crying child. She did not take it in her arms; she did not know exactly how to take hold of a baby; but she had a rosy apple in her pocket, and put that into the little hands that were rubbing the tearful eyes. Then she took off the locket she wore at her neck, and swung it to and fro, held her watch to the baby’s ear, and succeeded so well in her endeavours, that by the time the elder girl came back, she and baby were fast friends. Baby’s sister looked abashed at the sight of the elegant young lady, who, by that time, was sitting on the ground with baby in her lap, and Eulalie did not know what to say; but Lisa’s frank “Thank you, miss; I’m afraid she’s been a trouble to you,” as she took the child from her, broke the ice, and acquaintance was soon made.

It took a good many days to plough the fields round the oak-grove, and every day Eulalie was there, on the look-out for Lisa and her little sister. She minded the baby whilst

Lisa explored the hedges and ditches, and collected untold treasures ; and that hour was to her the happiest of the whole day.

But one day she waited in vain—no Lisa and no baby-sister ! What could be the matter ? After some hesitation she made up her mind to ask the ploughman, and when he said that “the little one” was very ill—dying, he almost feared, of inflammation of the chest—Eulalie felt a lump rising in her throat. Without a moment’s thought she set off in the direction of the cottage where her little friend lived ; she knew well where it was, and soon reached the door. Lisa heard the knock, and came to open, and smiled sadly on seeing who it was. Eulalie entered, and saw the child, moaning and flushed with fever, on its mother’s lap.

She had never seen a sick child before, never seen any one in pain, and she could think of nothing else the whole day. Mrs. Tenassy noticed that she was silent and preoccupied, and asked her kindly if there was anything the matter. Little by little Eulalie told her all about her new friendship, which, until then,

she had concealed from everybody — partly from a dread of being laughed at by some one, she did not exactly know who ; partly from a feeling that she did not want to be praised or thought good. Mrs. Tenassy asked Eulalie to go that very afternoon to the doctor, and beg him, from her, to go at once to see Farmer George's baby, and leave word at the Castle on his way back how it was, and whether the mother was in want of anything that she could send. Eulalie did not know the way to the doctor's, but Blanche and Alice volunteered to show her. Blanche knew Lisa, she said, by sight, having often seen her at the Sunday school, and noticed how clean and tidy she looked, and how regular and punctual she was in her attendance.

The doctor was found and despatched, and in the evening he called at the Castle to say that the child was very ill ; it was impossible to say yet whether it would recover ; that some new flannel to lay on its chest, an extra blanket, and some chicken broth, were the only things the mother wanted at present.

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Next day, and every day after that, Eulalie—sometimes alone, sometimes with Blanche or Alice, or both—was to be seen climbing the hill and the stiles, and lifting the latch of Farmer George's door to ask how baby was; and the baby, as it grew better, no sooner saw Eulalie come into the room, than it stretched out its arms to be taken.

Having overheard the mother say one day that she wished she had a warm woollen jacket for the child, as it so often threw off the bed-clothes, and thus risked catching fresh cold if no one was by to cover it up again, Eulalie, who had seen Bridget knitting such jackets at her door when she passed, plucked up courage to ask her to teach her. She did not need much teaching, for, as Miss Duval had often observed, Eulalie was very quick, and clever enough to do almost anything when she chose to apply her mind to it; and the soft white jacket baby had on the morning Eulalie and Alice received the letters from Ernestine and Jeanne, given in full at the beginning of this chapter, was the result of three or four stolen visits to Bridget's cottage.



## CHAP. XXI.—THE CONFIRMATION.

TWO years have passed since Alice and Eulalie paid their first visit to St. Foy; and now, in the month of June, Alice is there again, by Blanche's particular desire, to be present at her confirmation. Madeline is going to be confirmed too, with Blanche, for not long after the St. Clairs had left the Castle she had had scarlet fever, and been thereby prevented from attending the complete course of preparatory lessons of that year; and as a confirmation was only held at St. Foy every alternate year, it thus happened that the two friends, in spite of the difference in age, were now to be confirmed together. It was a pretty sight to see the candidates trooping with serious faces to church and filling the aisles. In the chancel sat Mrs. Tenassy and Alice with Nanny,

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resplendent in a new shawl and cap. How happy the old nurse was that morning, though, at the first notes of the organ, she melted into tears, and again and again, throughout the service, had to have recourse to her handkerchief. She was thinking of another confirmation long, long ago, in a church with beautiful stained windows, far away—of another slight girlish figure, veiled in white—of one who had been, still was, all the world to her—one to whom she then was, and had been ever since, mother, and nurse, and friend; and as Blanche and Madeline knelt at the altar-rail to receive the bishop's blessing, Nanny felt that her prayers in those far-off days, that God would bless her child, were answered now in Blanche. Mrs. Tenassy too was happy, and shed tears of thankfulness as she thought of the change the last three years had wrought in Blanche; the pain she had suffered was all forgotten in the sense of present joy.

I shall not attempt to describe the feelings of the two girls kneeling as equals before God. They owned to each other afterwards that their



THE CONFIRMATION.



confirmation day had been the happiest day of their lives.

When the service was over, they separated at the church door, promising to meet again soon. Blanche drove back to the Castle, and Madeline walked home with her mother. Bridget had prepared a little feast in honour of the day, and the two boys had been entrusted with spreading the table in her absence. They had not let the grass grow under their feet; everything was in perfect readiness, and the flowers they had been out in the meadows to gather before the sun was up, and which now adorned every available nook and corner, gave quite a festive appearance to the room. They could not take their eyes off their sister, who, they said, looked like a princess in her white dress.

"I should like you to be confirmed soon again, Madeline," said Andrew.

Very happy they all were that day, but none so happy as Madeline. It seemed to her as though she had everything she wanted, and as if she could never be half thankful enough to God for all His mercies.

As her mother insisted on doing all the work for once, Madeline went out into the lane with her brothers. Not twenty yards from the door they met the old man to whom Madeline, nearly three years ago, had given their two last remaining pennies. He stopped her, and told her that he had come a long way to see her, because he knew it was her confirmation day, and because he had a present to give her.

"A present for me!" said Madeline, surprised.

"Yes, a present for you; you think I am too poor to have anything to give, but you are mistaken; I have something to give in return for the money you gave me that day—the two pennies in the white cup—all you had left; and your mother in bed, pale and sick——"

"I know; I remember," said Madeline, interrupting him; "but how did you know that?"

"I heard you say so; you spoke very low, but not too low for me to hear: those two pennies you gave me for the love of God—did I not say that He would reward you? Was I not right?"

"Yes, indeed you were, for after that mother



THE OLD BEGGAR'S BLESSING.

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got well, and then everything seemed to go better."

"I knew it would. 'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord.' Never forget the white cup, child, as long as you live. And now, my children, farewell, and God bless you; I am going away now, and you will probably never see me again. As you once gave me all you had, so I now give you all I have to give, my blessing!"

Madeline and her brothers had knelt as he uttered these solemn words, and when they rose from their knees he had left them.

They went back to the cottage and told their mother what had happened, Madeline adding—

"I have something to ask you."

"What is it, dear?"

"Give me the white cup, will you? I should like to keep it in remembrance of to-day, and that day long ago, when you told me to give away our last penny for the love of God."

"Take it, darling, and welcome; and the love of God be with you now and evermore."



## CHAP. XXII.—DAME NIXON.

**A**T the Castle, too, a feast had been spread in honour of the day, and a joyous party was assembled to partake. The sunshine outside was too inviting for Alice and Blanche to sit long, so, begging Mrs. Tenassy and the rest of the company to excuse them, they strolled out arm-in-arm into the park.

“How glad I am that I was able to be here to-day, Blanche; I would not have missed this visit for worlds; no number of letters from you could have made up to me for not being in church with you this morning. I shall always look upon St. Foy as a sort of second home. I sometimes wonder what I should have been like if I had never come here.”

“Tell me, by-the-bye,” said Blanche; “talking of dress and amusement, what has become of your friends, Jeanne and Ernestine?”

"Oh ! fancy how sad. Poor Ernestine has become a confirmed invalid. The doctors say there is nothing really the matter with her, if she could be roused from her despondency and fancied incapability to move ; but everything has been tried in vain ; she cares for nothing and nobody, and lies on the sofa all day, hardly even pretending to work or read. Poor Jeanne is quite miserable about her ; her spare minutes are few and far between ; but all that she can do for Ernestine she does."

"Poor Ernestine ! how I pity her. I wonder whether a summer at St. Foy, and mother and Nanny to talk to, would cure her."

Just then they caught sight of Madeline and her brothers, and went to join them.

"Madeline," said Blanche, "I wanted so to see you. Did you notice, as we came out of church this morning, that Dame Nixon was at the gate, leaning on her crutches, and watching us ?"

"Yes ; and looking very gloomy, as usual."

"Well, I know she did, poor old thing ! but I felt very sorry for her nevertheless ; so I determined that I should go and see her this

afternoon, and try to cheer her up, and take her some of the cake Nanny made for me in honour of the day. Supposing you were to come too, Madeline; will you?"

"Yes; if you go, I will, though I don't believe I should have thought of it otherwise, for she always seems so cross, and I don't feel inclined to see cross faces to-day; but if you wish it, I'm ready."

In a few minutes they had been up to the Castle to fetch some cake and a bottle of wine, and were knocking at Dame Nixon's door.

"Come in; it's you, miss, is it?" said the old woman, with evident pleasure, as she looked up from her chair by the fire; "and so, even to-day you haven't forgotten the cross old woman who has plagued you so often."

"Why, no, of course not, Dame Nixon; to-day of all other days I should not forget you, because I am so happy that I want to make everybody else happy too. Come now, cheer up and don't look so grave."

"Ah, miss! if you only knew half how wretched I feel."



THE VISIT TO DAME NIXON.



"That's because you keep everything to yourself, and that drives every one away ; you won't let people try to help and comfort you."

"And who should I speak to about my troubles, I'd like to know ; who'd care to listen ? I've got no friends."

"You have God, Dame Nixon ; why don't you tell Him all you suffer ? He is never tired of listening to our prayers. Cry to Him, and He will deliver you from all your trouble."

"Pray for me, miss, and teach me how to pray. Come and read to me sometimes about God and His love, and perhaps He will make me better. You must be one of His beautiful angels, for no one else could have borne with all my crossness as you have."

Blanche bent and kissed the poor, solitary, peevish old woman, and that kiss did more than all her words to break down the fancied barriers between them. Dame Nixon never again said, "they're rich, and we are poor ; they can have no feeling for the likes of us."

Tears were dropping on her withered hands, as the girls closed the door behind them.



## CHAP. XXIII.—THE NURSE'S LEGACY.

“**M**AY I try, mother dear ?”

“To be sure, dearest, you may ; I shall be only too glad if you succeed. Get Alice to go with you ; she cannot resist your united persuasions, I am sure, though she would not yield to mine on my wedding day.”

“Come, Alice, you are particularly wanted, and bring all your powers of fascination with you ; I am going to try and induce Nanny to sit down to dinner with us to-night, in honour of the day ; I will take no refusal.”

Off ran the two in high spirits to Nanny’s room, but she was asleep in her chair, tired with the unwonted excitement of the day. They went softly in, and sat down to wait until she woke.

“What a nice room this is !” said Alice, in a hushed voice ; “so peaceful and home-like.”

“Yes; I’ve had some happy times here,”

rejoined Blanche ; "that little wooden stool you're sitting on—which, by-the-bye, is in a very shaky condition, let me warn you ; take care that it doesn't come down with you—I call my 'stool of penitence.' Many's the time I've sat down upon it to unburden my heart, and got up with a sense of relief. Sometimes I come here to be praised ; praise is generally much better for us than blame, and makes one much more resolved to do better next time than blame does ; at least I think so. But the reason, above all other reasons, for my loving this little room, is that it was here Nanny told me mother's history, and showed me her treasure, which, when she dies, she says is to be mine."

At that moment Nanny woke, and looked very much astonished when she found that she was not alone. Blanche, without giving her a moment to collect her senses, assailed her with entreaties that she would come down and have dinner with them, "just for this once ;" whilst Alice assured her that if she did not she should believe it was because she was there, and that that would make her miserable.

The girls won the day, and she was led off in triumph, and welcomed by Mrs. Tenassy who taunted her good-humouredly with being more indulgent to Blanche than ever she was to her poor ill-used Athenaïs.

The meal was a happy one; everybody was in good spirits, and Alice felt like one of the family, so completely had she entered into all their interests.

After dinner, Nanny was installed in a comfortable chair in the drawing-room, and told to take her nap, as if she were in her own room.

"Go to sleep, Nanny," said Mrs. Tenassy, affectionately; "we'll be as quiet as you used to be, in Italy, when I was asleep, and you sat beside me at work; do you remember?" At the mention of Italy a bright smile overspread old Nanny's face. Those were happy days—as happy as these, in spite of all their hard work and sorrow.

"I do not want to sleep," said she, gaily, "I am going upstairs to fetch something, and as it's rather heavy, I know Miss Alice will be so good as to come and help me."



NANNY IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.



Alice was only too delighted to be in such request, and the two left the room together. They shortly reappeared, Alice carrying the rosewood box which, during all these years, had never once been moved from Nanny's room.

"Blanche dear," said Nanny ; "you are very young still, but my course is all but run ; I am ready to go in the Lord's own time, for we shall meet again, please God, in another world ; but I've a fancy to give you, with my own hands, what I told you once would be yours when I am dead. Here, take it and treasure it as I have treasured it ; some day you will have children of your own to show it to. Teach them to be good as your mother was ; tell them how I loved you both."

Blanche, with tears in her eyes, took the box from Nanny's hands. "Thank you so much, dear Nounou ; I shall put it in my room, and you will often come there to see it ; promise me you will. It shall belong to both of us."

As she spoke she opened the box, and, seeing her collar and the paper that was pinned to it, shut it quickly again. "Why ! I thought none

but God saw me then," she said to herself in a whisper.

Nanny only smiled ; the clock struck ten, and she got up saying it was bed-time.

"Good night," said Mrs. Tenassy, tenderly ; "promise that you will sit down to dinner with us every day ; do, now, please. If you are not one of the family, I wonder who is ?"

"Good night, ma'am ; I would rather go on as I have begun. God gave to each her appointed place—to you the higher, to me the lower. He hath done all things well ; and the time of my departure is at hand."

Seeing the sad look which came over her mistress's face at these words, she said, in the caressing tone in which she used to speak to her when she was a child, and so low that no one else could hear—

"What does it matter where I sit, Athenais ? my best place is in your heart, child. That has always been mine, and will be to the very end, I know."

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